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Through conflict to sustainability:  
engaging with 'the space between' entities  
and individuals working in collaboration in  
the UK and the Netherlands

A dissertation submitted to the University of Bristol in accordance with the requirements for  
the award of the degree of PhD in the Faculty of Social Sciences and Law

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July 2019

Word count: 65,095



## Abstract

As formerly centralised social infrastructure services are outsourced, organisations with highly disparate cultures and working practices are increasingly required to collaborate to deliver essential community-facing services. Sustaining such multi-sectoral and cross-cultural collaborations over time requires an ongoing synthesis of myriad values, norms and hierarchies, thus increasing the potential for conflict as well as relying heavily on interpersonal relationships. This exploratory research study aimed to better understand how conflicting views arrived in 'the spaces between' individuals and organisations working in collaboration and to explore how differences were negotiated. The small-scale mixed methods research design used a complexity-informed framing to surface differing viewpoints and needs in four task groups. Participants ( $n=21$ ) were drawn from two cross-sector collaborative systems which delivered community-facing work in the UK and the Netherlands. Each group completed an identical 2-hour interactive, self-managed session consisting of four separate tasks: initial reflections on why they took part in the research; co-creating a map of the collaborative system surrounding a specific piece of work; exploring values that underpinned the work; and final reflections. Data collected included recordings of all participant interactions; participant-created maps of two multi-level collaborative systems; observation and reflection data; feedback data from participants; and entries from the PhD journal. An iterative, emergent approach to the data analysis resulted in the development of an innovative methodology for visualizing qualitative group data. Building on previous studies of small group mood, these visualizations highlighted shifts of energy in the group interactions and explored how these shifts related to laughter use in the groups. Textual analysis of the data built on the visualizations to explore micro-power dynamics and strategies used by participants to negotiate fields of tension during their discussions. The combined visual and textual data analysis surfaced a number of findings in relation to collaborative work, from the impact of nonverbal interaction on positive group function to the significance of insider/outsider positioning and the ranking of knowledge hierarchies. Theoretical and applied outputs from the transdisciplinary research include reflections on the active engagement with an emergent frame in qualitative research; a conceptual focus on 'the space between' to illuminate group dynamics and interactions; the trial of innovative research methodologies, from the visualization of qualitative data to psychodynamic observation of undercurrents in group interaction; a heightened awareness of the importance of nonverbal communication in group interaction; and negotiation strategies employed by participants as they worked together. These outputs hold relevance for the social science research community; for those working in or with collaborations across a range of settings; and for both research and practice in relation to the sustainability of multi-sectoral and cross-cultural working environments and programmes.



## Dedication and acknowledgements

There are many people, places, events and inspirations behind this thesis, far too many to name. Among the most significant are all my colleagues in Community Resolve over long years of mutual support and innovation. There isn't a one that hasn't found their way into this work in one way or another.

An equal appreciation goes out to a raft of European friends and colleagues made during the time of this research project, from many generous-hearted and committed people in the Netherlands (especially Marieke Stenvers and Paul Jansen) to the Belgium crew involved in *Beyond Us and Them*. Big thanks too to all the participants in the study for willingly offering themselves up for scrutiny with no idea of the end result. I hope very much that the output made it worthwhile, even if it has taken a very long time to appear.

The joy of this experience for me has been working alongside so many fine and interesting people, from Professor Paul Hoggett with his initial and ongoing support and encouragement to Gertjan van Oldenborgh and Willem de Lannoy in Amsterdam and Bobby Stuijzand and Derek Edwards in Bristol. To Gertjan I owe an enormous debt for his time, skills and boundless enthusiasm for the project and for bringing Willem and his insightful reflections to the study - invaluable. Without Bobby's willingness to head off down a rabbit hole with me there would be no visualizations, and without Derek there would be no beauty in the final designs.

I have to thank all my many supervisors over the long years but in particular David Sweeting for his quiet, clear and consistent presence throughout, pulling me back from the brink of over-enthusiastic innovation. And of course Lois Yellowthunder, who from her desk in far-away Minnesota kept a close eye on my progress from the very beginning, contributing way too many crucial observations and ideas for me to list here but which helped shape and refine the thesis all along the way.

Lastly, all love to my long-suffering family who put up with years of PhD tales and wails and believed in me from beginning to end.

My grateful appreciation to you all.



## Author's declaration

I declare that the work in this dissertation was carried out in accordance with the requirements of the University's *Regulations and Code of Practice for Research Degree Programmes* and that it has not been submitted for any other academic award. Except where indicated by specific reference in the text, the work is the candidate's own work. Work done in collaboration with, or with the assistance of, others, is indicated as such. Any views expressed in the dissertation are those of the author.

SIGNED: ..... DATE:.....





## Table of contents

CHAPTER 1: NEGOTIATING 'THE SPACE BETWEEN'	13
Why this research?	14
The significance of the work	17
Chapter synopsis	17
CHAPTER 2: CONCEPTUALISING 'THE SPACE BETWEEN'	20
Stepping out of the comfort zone	23
Stepping into the space between	29
Building a collaborative ethos	35
Embracing complexity	43
Conclusion	47
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY 1 - INVESTIGATING 'THE SPACE BETWEEN'	48
The research frame	49
Complexity influences	50
Psychosocial studies	51
Mixed methods	52
Case studies and systemic action research	53
The research design	54
Sample and taskgroup formation	55
Working with psychodynamic observation	58
Mitigating positionality	60
The research process	61
Data collection	62
Ethics and risk	65
Research credibility	67
Conclusion	68
CHAPTER 4: METHODOLOGY 2 – AN EMERGENT RESEARCH SPACE	69
Data analysis approach and integration	70
Analysing nonverbal data	73
Visualizing nonverbal communication	74
Conceptualising 'energy'	76
Generating the baseline visualizations	77
Designing the visualizations	82
Adding laughter points	86
Interactive data presentation	89
Strengths and limitations of the visualization approach	91
Conclusion	92

CHAPTER 5: FINDINGS 1 - VISUALIZING ‘THE SPACE BETWEEN’	93
UK Group 1 – Round 1 of data collection in the UK	95
Co-creating a map of the collaborative system	96
Selecting a field of tension to visualize	98
Adding laughter to the energy line	101
UK Group 2 - Round 2 of data collection in the UK	104
Co-creating a map of the collaborative system	104
Selecting a field of tension to visualize	107
Adding laughter to the energy line	109
NL Group 1 – Round 1 of data collection in the Netherlands	113
Co-creating a map of the collaborative system	114
Selecting a field of tension to visualize	116
Adding laughter to the energy line	119
NL Group 2 – Round 2 of data collection in the Netherlands	121
Co-creating a map of the collaborative system	123
Selecting a field of tension to visualise	125
Adding laughter to the energy line	127
Comparisons across the groups	129
Conclusion	132
CHAPTER 6: FINDINGS 2 - NEGOTIATING ‘THE SPACE BETWEEN’	134
The values task	135
UK Group 1	137
UK Group 2	145
NL Group 1	152
NL Group 2	158
Conclusion	164
CHAPTER 7: THE VALUE OF A ‘SPACE BETWEEN’ FOCUS	165
The impact of structure on relational dynamics	165
Power and micro-politics in collaborative delivery	169
Ways of engaging with conflict	171
Indicators of sustainability	175
An emergent research paradigm	178
Assessing the research design	182
Pointers for future study	187
CHAPTER 8: FINAL REMARKS	191

APPENDICES	195
Appendix 1: Informed consent form	195
Appendix 2: Instructions for data collection sessions	196
Appendix 3: List of values used in Task 2	197
Appendix 4: Early risk assessment for the research	198
Appendix 5: Examples of visualization design research	199
Appendix 6: Unitized transcripts of groups' fields of tension	202
REFERENCES	211

## Tables and figures

TABLE 1 STUDY SAMPLE (N=21)	58
TABLE 2 STRUCTURE OF TWO-HOUR DATA COLLECTION SESSIONS	63
TABLE 3 INCIDENTS OF LAUGHTER, UK GROUP 1	102
TABLE 4 INCIDENTS OF LAUGHTER, UK GROUP 2	110
TABLE 5 INCIDENTS OF LAUGHTER, NL GROUP 1	120
TABLE 6 INCIDENTS OF LAUGHTER, NL GROUP 2	127
TABLE 7 VALUES TASK RESULTS	136
FIGURE 1 LEDERACH'S TRANSFORMATIONAL PLATFORM.....	40
FIGURE 2 PARTICIPANT MAPS OF THE COLLABORATIVE SYSTEMS .....	72
FIGURE 3 DISCUSSION WAVEFORMS.....	78
FIGURE 4 INSTRUMENT USED TO MEASURE 'THE SPACE BETWEEN' .....	81
FIGURE 5 VARIOUS DESIGN ITERATIONS .....	84
FIGURE 6 DESIGN ITERATION 4 - THE FINAL DESIGN .....	85
FIGURE 7 WORK IN PROGRESS - DEVELOPING A CATEGORISATION OF LAUGHTER .....	87
FIGURE 8 OVERLAPPING FUNCTIONS OF LAUGHTER .....	88
FIGURE 9 DESIGN ITERATION 5 - THE ADDITION OF LAUGHTER POINTS .....	89
FIGURE 10 INTERACTIVE DATA PRESENTATION .....	90
FIGURE 11 UK GROUP 1 MAP OF COLLABORATIVE SYSTEM.....	97
FIGURE 12 UK GROUP 1 ENERGY LINES.....	100
FIGURE 13 UK GROUP 1 ENERGY LINE PLUS LAUGHTER .....	102

FIGURE 14 UK GROUP 2 MAP OF COLLABORATIVE SYSTEM.....	106
FIGURE 15 UK GROUP 2 ENERGY LINES .....	108
FIGURE 16 UK GROUP 2 ENERGY LINE PLUS LAUGHTER .....	111
FIGURE 17 NL GROUP 1 MAP OF COLLABORATIVE SYSTEM.....	115
FIGURE 18 NL GROUP 1 ENERGY LINES .....	118
FIGURE 19 NL GROUP 1 ENERGY PLUS LAUGHTER .....	120
FIGURE 20 NL GROUP 2 MAP OF THE COLLABORATIVE SYSTEM .....	124
FIGURE 21 NL GROUP 2 ENERGY LINE .....	126
FIGURE 22 NL GROUP 2 ENERGY LINE PLUS LAUGHTER.....	127
FIGURE 23 COMPARISON OF VISUAL OUTPUTS OF THE GROUPS.....	130
FIGURE 24 ANOMALIES IN THE VISUALIZATION PROCESS .....	186

## Chapter 1: Negotiating 'the space between'

In the UK, there has been a well-documented shift over the last 20 years or more towards joining up a fragmented local environment for community-facing service provision. This includes a reshaped role for local authorities, once the main player in local delivery but now seen as just one of many actors in relation to health and social services, for example (among many other fields). By removing functions and discretion from local authorities to create local forms of networked governance, demands on multi-sectoral collaborations have increased exponentially. Essential infrastructure and social support projects now involve combinations of organisations and agencies working on radically different scales, from citywide housing departments to local youth projects. The expectation that such collaborative structures (entities in themselves) will deliver sustained programmes of work places huge demands on organisations of all shapes and sizes and also raises significant questions about the value structures and power relations that underpin such collaborations. This study is interested in that dilemma - how to hold together such diverse entities over time in a fluid and responsive form – and aims to contribute to the sustainability of multi-sectoral and cross-cultural collaborative structures by better understanding intra-collaborative dynamics.

This PhD also forms part of a 20-year professional project to normalise our experience and perceptions of conflict, in the belief that approaching conflicts from a position of openness and optimism can materially improve the quality of people's personal, social and professional lives. Conflict is at the heart of our lives - at home, at work, across borders, located in our internal contradictions as much as in our day-to-day interactions with others. The study expands on the notion that conflict - the dynamic that emerges at the interface of differing needs, interests or worldviews - arises naturally and cannot be avoided. As rapidly shifting populations and the juxtaposition of different groups and backgrounds bring increasing layers of complexity to our societies, skills to manage difference constructively have never been so necessary. We cannot eliminate conflict, no matter how much we try. It is how we experience and engage with it that counts, as our response strategies impact those around us whether as an individual, group, team, organisation, government or nation.

A widespread reluctance to engage with conflict in any form, perhaps in part because it is often conflated in our minds with the idea of violence, has led to the shrinking of abilities to engage with others' ideas with an open mind. However, as a longterm collaborator in community-facing work, a facilitator of partnership programmes of all sizes and as a trainer and consultant in conflict skills and interventions (Wilkinson 2014), I am confident that it is by actively acknowledging and working through conflicts that sustainable collaboration is reached through the building of a shared collaborative ethos. At the heart of this ethos is support for individuals and organisations to manage the interface with difference and uncertainty and an active encouragement for differences to be spoken into the room in a constructive way. The more such skills and structures are embedded in everyday life (from political systems and societal structures to institutions, agencies and individuals) the more easily and creatively such differences of interest and worldview are accommodated.

The premise at the heart of this study is that by airing conflict, as opposed to putting a lid on it in order to maintain a calm surface (until someone blows), collaborative work groups can construct confident, trust-based relationships at an interpersonal and therefore inter-organisational level that can sustain an active engagement with the different needs and interests that are self-evidently part of the collaborative process. By looking at that challenge, this study identifies both strategies to develop collaborative resilience and creativity and indicators for collaborative sustainability.

### Why this research?

I came into the PhD from the world of practice, building on my experiences with an organisation I founded and developed over the last 18 years. Community Resolve ([www.communityresolve.com](http://www.communityresolve.com)) emerged in Bristol from the challenges facing some of its most disadvantaged city-centre wards – high levels of poverty, unemployment, poor schools, rapid demographic change, escalating street violence. The organisation worked to share skills with local people to address community tensions as well as providing training in engaging with conflict for individuals and groups living and working across Bristol, the UK and beyond. By the time its not-for-profit existence ended in 2013 (although it still operates as a socially-minded limited company), a team of 30-odd workers from a broad range of socioeconomic and ethnic backgrounds delivered wholesale conflict training across the city

to young people and adults in numerous settings, as well as delivering a raft of innovative practices (Wilkinson & Jagoo, 2014). Along the way, this journey - referred to by a co-founder as 'a roller coaster ride' - threw up numerous organisational and collaboration dilemmas that became the base for this exploratory PhD. I believe that these experiences are equally relevant to others engaging with collaborative work in dynamic, multi-level settings at both a theoretical and an applied level.

Our experience of community conflicts in the UK within and across numerous cross-sector networks led to a number of key and parallel theoretical interests. The organisation developed an extensive body of practice in relation to conflict engagement, empowering individuals to engage with conflicts around them in a more positive and creative way. It worked with community conflicts as they emerged in high-pressure and rapidly-changing local urban environments, working closely with the police, city council and many other agencies and groups. Its site-specific interventions drew on mediation principles as well as incorporating theoretical and applied models from management theory, psychosocial understandings and international conflict transformation work. In addition, I became increasingly convinced that a complexity-informed understanding of the world, with its acceptance of fluidity, unpredictability and constant movement, was helpful to accepting change as normal, both for individuals and for group interactions in communities and professional settings. Above all, I was interested in reframing the idea of 'conflict' at an all-day-every-day level, recognizing how much the lack of skills in this area was costing individuals, organisations and agencies of all sizes in terms of wellbeing, time, quality of delivery and money.

Over the years, I'd been told by a number of different people, including academics, that Community Resolve was like 'complexity in action'. I could immediately see the fit, given the multi-threaded and shifting local dynamics we were involved in, situated in time and place and which defied linear planning and evaluation. The chaotic, unpredictable nature of work in the open systems of community settings required an organisational balance between a stable core and innovative delivery, a tension I saw replicated citywide on many occasions in terms of provision of community-facing services. The literature relating to the relationship between complexity thinking, social research and human experiential space struck a



particular chord, as this matched exactly what we had been doing intuitively on the ground and provided a way to understand some of the dynamics we encountered along the way.

As an underpinning theoretical paradigm for the study, I decided to focus on the complexity-informed concept of emergence, using this to shape both the research design and my analysis of the data that it generated. Coming from the world of practice - as opposed to academia - it took me a while to understand that focusing purely on the experiences of a single organisation would not make for credible research, as it would provide only one experience of cross-sector collaboration at a particular site and during a specific time period - ideologically-shaped austerity in the UK. As a result, I decided to study in parallel the experiences of Dutch organisation Inkr8 (which translates as 'in power' and is pronounced '*In-cract*'), based in Amsterdam. This small community-rooted outfit which resolutely declared themselves 'not an organisation' delivered similar work to Community Resolve albeit on a smaller scale, equipping community facilitators from diverse backgrounds with conflict facilitation skills and understandings. For both, conflict transformation ideas and practice were a foundation for the work. I felt that by working with the two case study examples I could build some form of detachment into the study although how was not yet clear. To better understand the setting and cultural frames that informed the work of Inkr8, I moved to the Netherlands for three years during the time of the research to compensate for my lack of local knowledge and fluency, learning Dutch and working with Dutch colleagues in an impromptu research team along the way.

The resulting transdisciplinary and empirical research documented here is highly exploratory, deliberately unconventional and is influenced by a complex mix of personal interest, professional experience and theoretical concepts. The snapshot, qualitatively-led mixed methods study uses an interactive data collection approach to explore the triggers for conflict, as well as the strategies employed to engage with it, that emerged across four collaborative work groups, two in the UK and two in the Netherlands. It is not a comparative study *per se* but looks at the cross-system dynamics in each country. Inevitably, however, some comparisons arose from the data, pointing the way to further possible study.

## The significance of the work

I was intrigued by the description of Community Resolve as ‘complexity in action’, and in many ways I have replicated that idea here, seeing this study as ‘complexity-informed social science research in action’. The research is rooted in an understanding of any conflict as a multi-level, multi-directional soup of context, a complex adaptive system in itself and therefore open to any emergent outcome. The notion of ‘the space between’, a central pivot in the thesis, is used here to draw attention to the liminal space that opens up between individuals and organisations when they work together, a space formed and informed by the structures around it but inhabited by individuals. Their relationships and how they negotiate differences between themselves as individuals and organizational representatives are a measure of a collaboration’s creativity and sustainability, and the findings of this study point towards influential beneath-the-surface and in-the-room dynamics relating to both conflict and collaboration.

Overall, the theme that runs through my work is crossing boundaries – personal, professional, societal – and the negotiation of the spaces between different fields, social groups, cultural frames and understandings. As more and more work is done in collaboration across various types of ‘difference’, from sectors, disciplines and types of organisation to individual cultures and ethnicities, scant attention is paid to laying the foundational support for intra- and interpersonal relationships that underpin quality delivery and sustainability. With this in mind, this thesis is, I hope, a PhD for our times – alive and fluid as it tries to engage with and illuminate some aspects of rapid change, with resulting concepts to ponder in relation to personal, social and political dynamics. It is also pioneering in its attempts to test different approaches to research methodologies and data presentation, and its exploratory approach makes contributions to how it might be possible to identify emergent patterns and indicators in conflict situations which might anticipate conflict escalations and point the way to diffusing tensions.

## Chapter synopsis

*Chapter 2: Conceptualising ‘the space between’* presents a selection of influences and literatures that have impacted this transdisciplinary study from practice, personal interests and lived experience to disciplinary texts. I define key terms used in the thesis, including

conflict, multi-sectoral collaboration, emergence, liminality and 'the space between'. I draw on diverse disciplinary literatures to illuminate significant themes and gaps in relation to multi-sectoral and cross-cultural collaboration and conflict, and outline the framing of the complexity-informed paradigm that underpins the research design. The chapter concludes with a summary of how these various and diverse threads relate to both theoretical and applied levels of investigation in the following chapters.

Because of an unexpected and influential analysis direction that emerged during the research process, I follow the conceptual review with two methodology chapters. *Chapter 3: Investigating 'the space between'* covers the development of the research design including the shaping of the research question '*How might a focus on 'the space between' contribute to a theoretical and applied understanding of multi-sectoral collaboration dynamics?*'. I explain how a complexity paradigm informed both data collection and analysis, and how insights from practice and psychosocial studies influenced the interactive data collection format as well as other aspects of the research design.

The second methodology chapter, *Chapter 4: An emergent research space*, forms part of my findings. I chart the unfolding of the emergent approach I took to the analysis stage of the research, working with what jumped out during the early stages of data transcription, and set out the development of an innovative method for visualizing qualitative data which integrated the analysis of verbal and nonverbal elements in the group interaction. I conclude by reflecting on the challenges and value of the visualization approach in particular and on what it contributed to the study as a first step in the data analysis.

In the first of two findings chapters, *Chapter 5: Visualizing 'the space between'* presents the visualizations of four 'fields of tension', generated to reflect nonverbal elements in the group interactions. I explore what can be understood through the visualizations about the dynamics of each data collection group as participants engaged in interactive tasks, drawing on additional participant, observation and reflection data. The chapter ends with a brief summary of the findings across the four groups and the key insights into conflict and collaboration that were generated by working with a visualization approach.

Conflicts never occur in a vacuum. In the second findings chapter, *Chapter 6: Negotiating 'the space between'*, I return to the four fields of tensions visualized in Chapter 5 to explore

the minutiae of micro-power relations between participants as they worked together. Using data from across each two-hour session, again including observation and reflection data, I explore the conflict strategies participants draw on during the sessions and what helped or hindered their collaborative endeavours. I also reflect on how these might be connected to wider societal undercurrents in play at the time.

In *Chapter 7: The value of a 'space between' approach*, I revisit the literature and other influences cited in Chapter 2 and discuss these in light of the findings set out in Chapters 5 and 6. I identify how and where the thesis contributes new or contradictory elements to studies to date in order to build on previous literature and practice, and highlight the significance of researching within a complexity paradigm. I conclude with a review of the strengths and weaknesses of the research design and with suggestions as to where further research might complement the work completed here.

To finish, *Chapter 8: Final remarks* briefly revisits the initial premise of the study as set out in the introduction with a reflection on the experience of writing the PhD and its relationship to applied work in the field.

Additional material includes a bibliography and a number of Appendices, as set out in the contents list. These include research consent forms and paperwork, relevant extracts from the data and examples of the design research which informed the visualization project.

## Chapter 2: Conceptualising 'the space between'

The societal challenge I am wrestling with in this study is the need to work in a sustained way in collaboration, across sometimes very oppositional cultures and interests, to provide consistently high-quality community-facing services. To achieve their aims, such multi-sectoral and cross-cultural ventures often need to grapple with some of the most enduringly complex problems of our times (entrenched poverty and unemployment, youth violence, rising levels of mental health issues and so forth), complex problems which are typically open-ended and multi-dimensional as well as unpredictable. Operating in such diverse and uncertain contexts requires a stable, consistent presence able to engage with multiple stakeholders and worldviews while providing a timely response to pressures from the external environments they are working within (Hendrick 2008). Given the political, socioeconomic and technological complexity of the modern world, this leads to considerable stress and strain on organisations and individuals, as well as the collaborations they are involved in, as they are buffeted by the emergent dynamics that characterize delivery in complex social environments (Healey 2007; Vervotec 2015).

Unsurprisingly, many and varied conflicts of interest and need will arise in what Armistead et al. (2007) refer to as 'the noise' of collaboration in relation to cultural differences, overload, different strategic directions and issues of delivery implementation, as well as more overt intra-organisational struggles in relation to issues of power, influence and resistance (Hastings 1999; Pettigrew 2003). These ongoing challenges for collaborative and organisational leadership as well as for individuals engaged in day-to-day implementation of collaborative aims have implications for sustainability (Crosby & Bryson 2010). Although within this context of this study such conflict is understood as inevitable and normal in a complex adaptive system, it nonetheless creates an important and additional layer of work for any collaboration: negotiating the relational complexities of fragmented governance (Healey 2007). At any one time, then, such collaborations face a multitude of multi-directional conflicts – internal to the collaborative structure itself and in relation to implementing delivery, as well as in response to the broader societal and political contexts they are operating within.

Given the increasing importance placed on collaborative work as the route to solving complex issues that stretch across public, voluntary and private sectors (Armistead et al., 2007), it is imperative that we develop more sophisticated understandings of the dynamics of the collaborative experience to ensure successful outputs and also to support sustainability (cf Pettigrew 2003; Kokx & van Kempen 2009; Teenstra & Pinkster 2015). While the research presented here is primarily focused on the relational dynamics between those working together inside collaborative structures, it recognizes the tight interconnection between the quality and productiveness of those relationships and the power dynamics at play through the structures and systems that surround them (Healey 2007). A key proposition in this empirical study is that the sustainability of a collaborative structure depends on a resilient relational core that encourages the proactive naming of and engagement with conflicts of interest and need, and which requires specific attention alongside formal collaboration protocols.

In this thesis, I use the term ‘conflict’ to describe a felt struggle between two or more interdependent individuals or groups over perceived incompatible differences in values, beliefs and goals (Wilmot and Hocker, 2011). This definition also includes struggles relating to a desire for control, status, reputation and belonging, and encompasses a psychosocial understanding of conflict as internal as much as external to ourselves, rooted in the space where our internal sense of self meets the realities of our external worlds and connections (Becker & Weyermann, 2006). This perspective stresses the significance of emotions and feelings that underpin all conflict situations, whether spoken or not, while the idea of interdependence underlines both the connection and the space between individuals and groups, a paradox that generates tension and as I argue here, also holds the potential to act as a catalyst for creativity. In addition, and importantly, conflict is understood in this thesis as a natural, energetic and dynamic force, an inevitable part of life and a value-free state which is neither good nor bad but which can be manipulated in positive or negative directions. Although I draw extensively on conflict resolution and transformation literatures for this work, it is important to note that ‘conflict’ here does not refer to violence or armed conflict.

There is no shortage of literature across a range of academic disciplines that is directly or indirectly related to working with conflict at a theoretical or applied level. However, in this

transdisciplinary PhD the aim has been to weave together myriad voices, approaches and academic traditions into one single exploration of how points of conflict emerged and were addressed in four task groups. In this study, I am using the concept of transdisciplinarity as the complexity version of interdisciplinarity (Hendrick 2008) and am engaging with the idea that all knowledge is a partial construction or perspective (Hetherington et al 2018). My interest here was to explore what I did not know rather than to prove what I already thought, and to remove as many of my own (and others') preconceptions as possible along the way. That meant remaining open to what arrived across the life-course of the PhD as well as drawing on other sources, ideas and influences from beyond academia. As a result, the following chapters include tried and tested practice methodologies, personal journal entries and accounts of my own related collaborative experiences, as well as writings from the Greek philosopher Heraclitus (c.5000 BC) and early Daoist Lao Tzu (c.500 BC). The study is also greatly informed by my work over 20 years as a conflict coach, facilitator and trainer; by my enduring attachment to jazz (which formed a lyric-free soundtrack to the writing of this PhD); and by my life in the Netherlands for three years as I worked on the PhD; and by other projects undertaken with Dutch and other European colleagues.

In relation to identifying appropriate academic literature, I began with a systematic review of the key disciplinary areas outlined in the previous chapter - conflict transformation theory, psychosocial studies, urban studies and organisational and management fields as well as complexity thinking in the social sciences. Using a series of search terms – cross sector, collaboration, conflict, micro-power relations, emergence and so forth – I identified some initial core concepts to apply to the research design, building on these through further ad hoc encounters and leads gleaned from relevant books and journal articles. These concepts then informed my overall research paradigm as well as the research design. Following the completion of the empirical research, I then returned to this initial basket of concepts to include new iterations of literature that related to findings that emerged over the course of the study – understanding more about laughter and silence are two good examples.

However, this review is focused on drawing together experiences and influences that underpin the research topic, question and design, and as a result, there are many, many sources omitted here that could have been included. Nonetheless the core of the study and its structure rests in an academic frame and the chapter that follows draws on the work of

conflict transformation theorist and practitioner Jean Paul Lederach. In his work *The Moral Imagination* (2005) Lederach identified four elements that he considered central to the building and maintenance of sustainable and inclusive collaborative structures in post-violent conflict environments. These were, as summarized in Paffenholz (2013), an ability to imagine relationships with others, including those that are difficult to work alongside; the capacity and willingness to take risks and step into the unknown to find new, joint solutions; the development of a shared ethos and way of working that opens the door to imagination, emergent ideas and creativity; and the ability to imagine complexity as a friend rather than as an enemy. Here, I reconceptualise these themes for complex social environments (Vervotec 2015) and outline on a range of related ideas, theories and practice in the following four sections:

- Stepping out of the comfort zone
- Stepping into the space between
- Creating a collaborative ethos, and
- Embracing complexity.

### Stepping out of the comfort zone

Rapid diversification, global movements and a newly interconnected world means we are all being coerced, pushed, pulled out of our comfort zones in one way or another. While these are indeed confusing times, philosophers stretching back millenia have been reflecting on the constantly shifting and fluid nature of the living world, and on the struggles that humans have had in managing this constant shift and change. In the late 6th century BC, Greek philosopher Heraclitus of Ephesus wrote that '*In the same river we both step and do not step, we are and are not*', an observation based on nature that both we as individuals and the world around us are in a constant state of change and flux: '*Cold things grow hot, the hot cools, the wet dries, the parched moistens*'. In his study of Heraclitus' writings, Graham (2015) suggests that more than simply referring to the inevitability of change, a more profound understanding here is that some things can only remain the same through change, and that therefore sustainability lies in the continuous turnover of matter. Constancy and change are not in opposition but inextricably connected. Reflecting on the human tendency



to embrace groupthink and fixed mental modes, Chinese poet/philosopher Lao Tzu (c.5<sup>th</sup> century BC) also drew deeply on observations of nature to reflect on how rigidity rooted in a state of self-absorption or self-interest meant being out of step with the dynamic universal process, which he also identified as being in a state of constant flux. For Lao Tzu, who is credited with writing the massively influential *Tao Te Ching* as advice to early Chinese rulers on the use of power, the individual cultivation of softness (meaning an openness, fluidity and adaptability) led to sustainability through an infinite ability to mould oneself to a situation, much in the way that water finds its way around any obstacle (Mitchell 1988).

Operating in such fluid way is equally relevant today, and it is striking that the three qualities Lao Tzu points to are increasingly aspired to in management and leadership literatures looking at how to engage with and address complex problems (cf Hazy et al, 2007; Armistead et al. 2007; Crosby & Bryson 2010). New circumstances require new approaches, and while well-tried and tested structures and systems have provided clarity and a sense of security in relation to challenging delivery in the past, the rapid growth in multi-dimensional collaborative work brings fresh demands. In her book exploring planning challenges in urban regions of increasing complexity, Healey (2007:269) notes how '*the patterning of power dynamics and routines of practice are held in place but are also unsettled by movements in the wider society, the spheres of civil society and the economy*'. For individuals involved in such work at a time of such rapid and unpredictable change, the ability to retain flexibility of attitude and approach without losing balance and perspective is a key challenge. Combining the experiences and perspectives of a wide range of individuals and organisations makes it increasingly difficult to rely on previous homogeneous understandings and approaches, as settings that include multiple stakeholders and worldviews challenge our individual psychological and theoretical roots as well as well-established working practices.

Working alongside multiple frames in a genuinely open knowledge hierarchy demands the mental resilience to put down a protective mask of expertise (Meek & Newell 2005) as well as an ability to maintain a breadth of perspective (Hendrick 2008; Klein 2004 in Hendrick 2008). To step away from their comfort zones, their usual patterns of interaction, both individuals and organisations need to develop affective skills such as openness to new ways of thinking. Unsurprisingly, many people do struggle to embrace such uncertainty at a personal or a professional level, some finding it hard to cope with no fixed points of

reference, others because of a lack of confidence, a sense that their usefulness is undermined (Hendrick 2008), or because of a reluctance to accept the idea of 'good enough' - that there is no such thing as the perfect plan or decision (Grindle 2011). For those used to programmes of work delivered over an extended timeframe it can be hard to engage with the value or even the idea of flexible and unpredictable outcomes, especially in blame or results-led cultures. In urban studies, scholars note how politically and intellectually challenging this can be for governance officers raised in an era of delivery of individual services through vertically structured hierarchies (Healey 2007).

As studies of complex community-facing collaborations around housing, urban restructuring and healthcare in the UK and Netherlands show (Taylor 2007; Bolt & van Kempen 2011; Teernstra & Pinskieter 2014), weaving together diverse perspectives, knowledge frames and power relations into dynamic, sustained partnership networks is not easy. Multi-vocal, multi-cultural and multi-layered realities pose additional challenges for cross-sector collaborations working alongside radically more diverse populations. Those operating in super-diverse contexts and communities can quickly become '*confused, powerless and overwhelmed*' (Vervotec 2007; Phillimore 2015) in the face of complexity and resort to 'othering' discourses that position those who don't fit into traditional systems as 'bad' or 'a problem' (Klijn & Koppenjan 2012; Teernstra & Pinkster 2015; Walters 2015).

Multiplicity is a significant quality of contemporary urban existence, dynamic places of social interaction in which multiple relations, activities and values '*co-exist, interact, combine, conflict, oppress and generate creative synergy*' (Healey 2007; Bridge & Watson 2011:527). As Bridge and Watson suggest, reconceptualising 'communities' as a network of open and dynamic systems can be helpful to recognise the inherent struggles, tensions and conflicts which are manifest in any multi-vocal context, and to understand the need to reshape policy formation within and for those environments. Given the dynamic and processual nature of such work, traditional approaches of forming fixed and final plans over a specific timescale, rooted in an assumption of a reachable permanent harmony, are no longer appropriate (Amin & Thrift 2002; Healey 2007). Healey suggests that a commitment to inclusionary ethics amongst those in governance positions encourages transparency and can act as a radar to keep individuals and organisations open to new ideas and developments, especially for those involved in multi-layered cross-sector partnerships.

*'From the perspective of rapidly changing knowledge, there is a fundamental shift in the conception of knowledge itself, from something certain and true to something changing and relative. Underneath this form of society lies experimentation itself, leading to people reflecting constantly upon their situation and the knowledge they possess to cope with it.*

JARVIS, 1999:10

In such fluid contexts, leadership skills have to include a real understanding of how to work respectfully with those on the 'margins of governance' as scholars from across multiple fields have attested (Lederach 1997; Subeliani & Tsogas 2005; Murphy & Arenas 2010; Paffenholz 2013; Chandler 2013). Recognising the challenges in multi-sectoral leadership, including how to acknowledge and synthesise conflicting views and interests without sweeping them under the table or falling back on established hierarchies of knowledge, there are calls for an increased focus on distributive leadership models which are multi-layered, dynamic and diverse. As Armistead et al. (2007) point out, these are more suited to the fragmented working environment of collaboratives. This means moving away from hierarchical leadership focussed on individuals and towards a theory of leadership that is decentralised and draws on the various conscious and unconscious leadership qualities across a collaborative group and which may well be unrecognised (Chandler, 2013; Wilkinson & Jagoo 2014). One example of such unseen leadership is out-of-sight 'backstaging', informal work with partners across a collaborative system to support individuals and organisations in conflict or to improve communications (Pettigrew 2003). A lack of understanding of, or respect for, the experiences, qualities and value frames of others in a collaboration leads to an ever-present tension seen in all areas of social and local governance policy and application - privilege-rooted decision-making processes that exclude non-managerial voices (van Bortel 2013), including between policy makers and commissioners who create 'the system world' and those living and working in diverse and complex communities (Saul & Bava 2008). Within a professional environment, this disconnect can manifest as a tussle between knowledges – whose knowledge is worth more?

Knowledge is never innocent, and is deeply implicated in the apparatus of power, governance and control. Throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century a traditional approach to socially-applied knowledge in academia saw it as framed and legitimized primarily through

disciplinarity (Klein 2000). However, increasing recognition that disciplinary practitioners are often so socialised into their disciplines that they lose their reflexivity has led to suggestions that disciplinarity can restrict vision in relation to unpicking and researching complex societal issues (Bridges 2006 in Chettiparamb 2007). These observations are equally applicable to multi-sectoral cross-cultural work in complex social environments, where individuals and organisations that espouse familiar types of knowledge or approach are preferred over others as collaborative partners – better the devil you know. Across the various literatures I am engaging with in this study, there are numerous examples of ‘professionals’ selecting their preferred partner groups from among those they find easiest to relate to or work with – ‘people like us’ (Subeliani & Tsogas, 2005; Murphy & Arenas 2010; Thissen 2011; Paffenholz 2013; Teernstra & Pinkster 2015). The danger of this lies in where the attention of a collaborative then lies, and in what makes it onto the agenda and what doesn’t (Crosby & Bryson 2010).

Within the context of collaborative working, the danger of narrowing the pool of knowledge in this way is that can lead to essential information considered too sensitive, dangerous or taboo being deliberately not acquired (Marshall 2014), thus undermining the validity of collaborative decision making and sowing the seeds for mistrust and non-engagement (Armistead et al. 2007). Zerubavel (2007) writes on the sociology of socially constructed silence, of how groups, organisations and societies avoid knowledges that they do not want to engage with through the use of silence. The performative nature of silence has also been noted by others (cf Mazzei 2007; Dupret 2019) who highlight its function as a key part of our communication *'like a substance that fills in the pauses and cracks and crannies of our discourse'*. In his book on the lack of progress in facing up to climate change, Marshall draws attention to the silence about the silence, citing sociologist Stanley Cohen’s distinction between ignorance (not knowing), denial (refusal to know) and disavowal (active choice not to notice). These socially negotiated meta-silences sideline contentious issues or unwanted knowledge by placing them outside the ‘norms of attention’ - the social rules of what is acceptable and unacceptable to talk about. Unwanted knowledges and insights, for example those which disrupt long-established power relations in ‘on paper’ collaborative ventures, might disappear under a veil of silence but will continue to undermine a collaborative core (Armistead et al. 2007).

*'What we pay attention to and how we pay attention - both individually and collectively - is key to what we create. What often prevents us from 'attending' is our blind spot, the inner place from which each of us operates. Learning to become aware of our blind spots is critical to bringing forth the profound systemic changes so needed in business and society today.'*

SCHARMER, 2016:32

A collaborative endeavour that invites and encourages contradictory opinions and which establishes a working ethos of genuine interest and inquiry, offers a route to awareness of our blind spots. More often than not, the disparagement or dismissal of the ideas of others are expressed through nonverbal signifiers as much as words – a look, a shrug, a laugh, a silence - all of which can be deeply disrespectful even if they are accompanied by neutral words. Laughter (as opposed to humour) is just one example, serving a complex range of functions from creating distance to revealing problem areas or dynamics (Gronnerod, 2004). If left unaddressed such micro-aggressions can quickly undermine group cohesion and trust (Reich & Reich 2006) but acknowledging such dynamics and misunderstandings as they arise, and especially those rooted in power dynamics, requires a jointly negotiated and agreed prior agreement on how to do this. The creation of a space where all voices are heard with an equal amount of respect, engaging with perspectives offered as 'different from' rather than 'less than', is central to that process.

Acknowledging the dilemma of reconciling *'the knowledge of expertise with the knowledge of experience'*, Meek & Newell (2005:326) stress that an essential starting point is setting aside time to understand the different underpinning values, priorities, theories and aims for each collaboration member, with a focus on challenging assumptions across the board about knowledge hierarchies. Such collaborative ventures can be undermined from the start by a failure to recognise individual contributions or the potential for synergy that they bring. They draw attention to the impact of language use and terminology, stressing the importance of accepting different modes of communication as of equal worth, and highlight how the emphasis on documentation (audits, paper trails and so forth) can skew the power dynamics in favour of some organisations over others. Above all, there needs to be an awareness of how an unequal distribution of funds and resources across a collaborative structure reinforces both structural (class, background, employment, educational status) and

relational (manners, inclusivity, respectful interaction) barriers to group cohesion (Reich 2006; Murphy & Arenas 2010; Paffenholz 2013; ). The field of 'design thinking' identifies that individuals only participate wholeheartedly in co-creation if it produces value for them too, and that this is best achieved by drawing on the experiences of all those involved in interactive encounters (Ramaswamy & Gouillart, 2010). This necessarily requires a platform where different needs, values and worldviews can interact and be shared.

In summary, 'stepping out of the comfort zone' is a key aspect of forming a shared collaborative ethos and demands a high level of self awareness and self reflection for both individuals and organisations involved. This is easier to achieve when there is a willingness to engage with the issue of unequal power dynamics however they should occur, an essential starting point for building trust between collaborative partners. This also requires engaging with others in a fluid and respectful fashion, staying open to others' viewpoints, knowledges, experiences and ways of working. These ideas are further explored in subsequent sections of this review as well as through the data collected in the empirical research, by looking at how different viewpoints are surfaced and negotiated, how and where silences appear in the system and what they represent, and in examples of competing knowledge frames across different levels in the collaborative structure.

## Stepping into the space between

*We join spokes together in a wheel but it is the centre hole that makes the wagon move.*

*We shape clay into a pot but it is the emptiness inside that holds whatever we want.*

*We hammer wood for a house but it is the inner space that makes it livable.*

*We work with being but non-being is what we use.*

LAO TZU, 5TH CENTURY BC PHILOSOPHER IN MITCHELL 1988:11

Lao Tzu's stanza above refers to the elusive nature of the interaction between structure and relationship, asking us to reflect on the ephemeral quality that brings a structure alive, that makes it livable and usable. In this study, that emptiness-which-is-full-of-potential is conceptualised as 'the space between', a phrase I have encountered in relation to reflections on identity (Webber 2008) or as used by researchers in relation to their role (cf Dwyer &

Buckle 2009) but which I have not come across in relation to engaging with conflict. I employ the phrase as an image of thought repeatedly throughout the thesis, purposely leaving it flexible and open-ended to draw attention to those dynamic, shape-shifting, nonverbal spaces between individuals, organisations or structures that are present in all human interaction.

It was reflecting on ideas and metaphors drawn from complexity thinking that got me started on the idea of 'the space between'. I was struck by the focus in complexity literatures on studying not the individual entities in a system (in this context, individuals, connectors, organisations and so forth) but the interaction *between* such entities (Kuhn & Woog 2007). Calling for more qualitative research that is rooted in complexity thinking, many scholars (cf Kuhn 2007; Burns 2013; Nijs 2014; Middleton-Kelly et al. 2018; Hetherington et al. 2018) have drawn attention to how studying interactivity between entities differs to more traditional social science research, which focuses on documenting the experiences and ideas of individual entities themselves.

Kuhn and Woog's research studies into human experiential space used data collection approaches which minimize researcher impact, generate group interaction and approach the analysis stage with a focus on emergent thought in the research space. This interested me at many levels. First, the challenge of researcher reflexivity and of minimising my own impact on the research resonated strongly with me. When working with entrenched negative conflict, a conflict facilitator has to be aware of their own prejudices in the space, internally acknowledging the presence of bias while working to keep it out of the room. The aim is to be even-handed and non-judgmental, accepting all perspectives as real to those who offer them. The role is to act as a clear, see-through prism between parties to aid the communication of *their* ideas rather than providing their own, no matter how tempting at times. These principles seemed a good place to start from for this piece of research.

Secondly, in negative conflict situations, individuals or groups come to form well-rehearsed patterns of self-justification and denial which need to be challenged and disrupted in order to shift to a new form of interaction. Working with each party in turn might shed some light on a situation and go some way to preparing new modes of thought, but it is not the key to moving the situation on. It is when those oppositional patterns meet together in a carefully constructed space held by a third party that individuals in negative thought modes are able

to meet and shift in relation to each other. As the crucible of newly forged relationship, it is what happens in this 'space between', a third space as Thissen terms it (2011), which is significant.

Lastly, if that space between is designed to allow and encourage emergent joint thinking, it is impossible to have a prior idea about what exactly will come out of such a meeting – although it is possible to know that something will emerge. The exact coincidence or synthesis of ideas in the space is always unpredictable, although previous holding patterns of interaction and path dependency might indicate a direction of travel. As outlined in the journal entry below, I have seen this process occur over and over again with stuck interpersonal and intergroup dynamics, and also in training and facilitation spaces where participants left feeling seen, involved, relevant and therefore energized.

In this thesis, then, 'the space between' is used as a device to signal the potential for emergent thought and creative outcomes whenever differences encounter each other. The space is located between our own internal contradictions, whether researcher or participant, and between the different cultural frames of those involved in the study. It is

#### **Journal entry, November 2015 - Reflections on teaching**

Observations from some 20 years of teaching, training, facilitation and mediation have reinforced my scepticism about the role of the 'expert', the prescriptive training format including a 'knower' who stands at the front of the room and shares their [implicitly] more valuable knowledge with others. In my experience, this well-established but unequal power dynamic blocks and skews group confidence and engagement, leading to withdrawal, self doubt and passive aggression. I have worked for years with what Lederach refers to as an elicitive training format (1995), combining a loose and fluid structure with input of new ideas which are then inhabited and brought alive by the group's own experiences, knowledge and cultural frames. In my experience, this way of working produces a heightened sense of optimism and enthusiasm in groups and individuals at the end of an encounter, both in relation to the given topic and also in relation to themselves. Again and again, I am struck by the energy and engagement generated in these learning environments. Individuals leave excited, as if new possibilities had opened up. Is this because they feel seen and verified? valued? allowed? How can we understand this energy that is generated?



located in the transdisciplinary theoretical underpinning of this work, in its emergent mixed-methods research design and in the space between theory and practice. The research itself is the product of collaboration, with its focus on two different systems located in two different languages and countries (in the UK and the Netherlands) which by necessity involved a team of English and Dutch speaking colleagues. True to the emergent aspirations of the research design, this led to unexpected insights and reflections that greatly added to the final output.

In addition, within the context of this study, 'the space between' also represents a metaphor to encourage individuals and organisations to understand themselves in a more fluid and therefore adaptable form which is full of untapped possibility. Despite our earnest desire to present as fixed, integrated, logical beings, we are not. But while we are highly connected to our environments both physically and psychically, a peculiarly separatist idea of the self developed in Euro Western thought has been profoundly influential. Anthropologist Geertz described this view of the self as '*a bounded, unique, more or less integrated motivational and cognitive universe, a dynamic center of awareness, emotion, judgment, and action organized into a distinctive whole and set contrastively both against other such wholes and against a social and natural background...*' (Geertz 1979:229 in Hermans et al 2016). Dutch psychologist Hubert Hermans reflects instead on the self as being in a state of constant flux, responding continuously to its environment and needing to retain a sense of fluidity in order to survive the uncertainty in our increasingly complex world (Hermans 2001). He challenges the idea of both a core essential self and of a core essential culture, suggesting instead that it is by the continuous process of negotiating a multiplicity of possible self-positions that our adaptive responses emerge, creating new and constantly changing hybrid identities. Hermans conceptualizes this internal negotiation as an ongoing positioning and counter-positioning in relation to others and their social power (Hermans et al 2016). Later in the study, I adopt and adapt his idea of a 'field of tension', originally used by Hermans to describe the space between internal contradictions within individuals and expanded here to describe the group process of negotiating contradictory positions between them as they worked together on the research tasks.

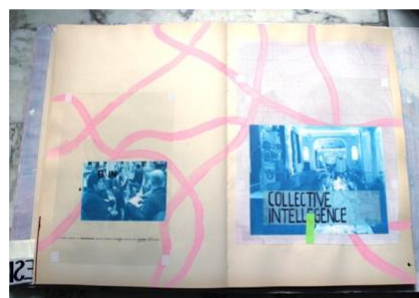
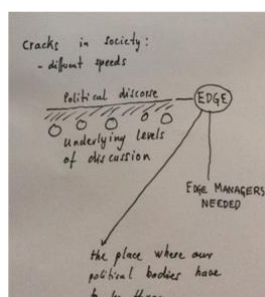
Another lens through which to reflect on this space of negotiation is through the concept of liminality, a mental hole or gap or space where our own internal boundaries are crossed and

where we engage with new possibilities. Liminal space is the place where we encounter and open up to new ideas, requiring a shift in our sense of self as we travel on what could be potentially treacherous thought journeys (Meyer & Land, 2006). Although the term first appeared in the fields of psychology, referring to a transitional threshold beyond which a sensation is consciously experienced, it originates from the Latin *limen* meaning 'threshold' and originally referred to the edges of the Roman empire or territory (Stenner 2013). As Stenner points out, the spatial dimension to the word is significant, suggesting movement in the crossing from one physical, mental or conceptual territory to another. For the process anthropologist Victor Turner, for example, entering into liminal space implied the *'temporary and ritual suspension of social structures'*, leading to rupture, transition and unpredictability (Stenner, quoting Turner 1977). This research is focusing on the 'forming and formative processes' of groups, where through a psychosocial lens, creativity is rooted in overcoming *'the pragmatic obstacles posed by paradox'* (Stenner 2018:260). This is interesting, echoing the idea that far from difference and conflicting positions impeding creativity, it is in fact the facing and overcoming of boundaries, of paradox and contradiction that lead us to creative and imaginative leaps.

The concept of liminal space, its potential and its dangers, also resonates strongly with the process of engaging with conflict. Where conflict appears in a system it highlights points of contention and disagreement, throwing light on structures and practices which are causing dissent or damage to ourselves or others (Hendrick 2009; Dudouet 2006). As such, individual, group and social conflict has an important and useful function (Durkheim; Simmel 1922; Coser 1953; Hirschman, 1994; Tajfel & Turner 1996), flagging up the need for better communication and understanding. The roots of all conflicts – big and small - are always deeper than the apparent 'presenting' causes and include a particular of-the-moment conflation of out-of-sight triggers, ranging from historical, social and financial contexts, cultural frames and emotional responses to individual and group dynamics around identity, belonging and power relations (Wilkinson 2014). As conflict is increasingly framed through social discourse as a 'bad thing' and to be avoided, in part because of its ubiquitous use as a synonym for violence, its potential to draw attention to micro-power inequalities that impede good relations or the best possible decision making is correspondingly reduced (Heffernan 2012). But while conflict can quickly descend into negativity when avoided or

### Journal entry, April 2017 - Beyond 'us' and 'them': the Brussels collaboration

I'm invited to join five men in planning an event in Brussels. They are Flemish academics and facilitators and we're linked through the Taos network. I'm the only woman. These men know each other well but nothing about me. They never ask. We talk and talk as the months pass but nothing gets decided or done. I find their inability to move to action too difficult so step in and take a chair role - and they are so very happy. They start behaving as if I am their ?mother? and I do too. I do not want to be 'in charge' of anything and yet I stepped forward. Perhaps I felt the need for a role to justify being there, the sole woman. After two false starts, we develop a title for the work: *Beyond us and them: creating shared collaborative identities*. We're none of us sure what it means. We find a venue, build a website, shape the event. We weave in an artist's take on how to document our thoughts. We agree, with some difficulty, that the event will be as 'flat' as possible with the idea of 'expert' taking a back seat. We finally meet in Brussels for 3 days - 20 people, a mirror-lined hall, paper everywhere. We each get a handcrafted name badge by the artists. On mine, which I want to love, is a picture of a stout middle-aged woman with a megaphone which unhelpfully triggers all my anxieties. I worry a lot about taking over (amplified by the megaphone badge) but that first evening we sit along a candlelit table and relish each other's company - a key step in creating a shared identity?



The artists take away all the paperwork and four months later a 'book' is complete. There has been no consultation. We sit and turn A3 pages of image and word, participants' ideas, drawings, phrases - remarkable, original, very interesting. I notice many, many spelling mistakes, and as the only native English speaker, I ask a colleague if he thinks I should tell the artist. He says yes. With trepidation I do, recognising the huge work that fixing all the spellings would involve. I do not want to mess up what's there. The artist passes me some mini post-its and I litter the beautiful artwork with fluorescent corrections. I feel like a schoolmarm, a pedant with no artistic soul. I wonder why the hell I said anything.

Months later, photos arrive of the finished book. I notice is that my 'corrections' are still there, small, fluorescent, impudent and find myself getting angry. I feel I have been put (!) in a horrible position, critiquing their work in such an ugly way and them ?sulking, ?too busy to respect my attempt at open and generous collaboration. I talk to the artist who says he likes the post-its - he says that they were added in such a direct, unreflecting way that is was like watching an artist at work, that the fluorescent marks make plain the collaborative nature of the book. I query this, asking 'Is this collaboration? Or is this your work, to which I added my critique?'. He acknowledges that this is an interesting question. I don't know the answer. Maybe he is right, and the fluorescent tabs do open up a further layer of reflection on what collaboration is.

badly managed, focusing on the creative value inherent in a diversity of views allows it to be seen and worked with as catalyst for change and growth. Numerous authors have argued that conflict should be reframed in this way, with those studying emotional intelligence seeing it as an opportunity for personal and social change and development (cf Mayer, 2000). When conflict's potential as a route to understanding, creativity, change and transformation is understood, anxieties about acknowledging and engaging with conflict can be lessened or alleviated, allowing individuals and groups to harness the new possibilities that open up as a result (Landau 2001; Dewulf et al 2009).

Conflict practitioners and theorists have long reflected on the conditions that are most conducive for changing mindsets in this way and for maintaining a new equilibrium. A central paradox when working with conflict is how to recognise its energy and function without letting it descend into violence (Galtung 1975; Dubiel 1998). What becomes important is not the stating of any one individual's position but how the different positions in the space synthesise in the moment. This requires an environment where people can listen differently to one another, breaking and overcoming negative communication and thought patterns to imagine a new relationship that they can step into. A liminal space where individuals can be at their most fluid and flexible allows a shift in engagement with 'difference' from an antagonistic, reluctant, even aggressive interaction towards a constructive and creative encounter (Landau 2001).

### Building a collaborative ethos

*'The more people's standpoints I have present in my mind while I am pondering a given issue, and the better I can imagine how I would feel and think if I were in their place, the stronger will be my capacity for representative thinking and the more valid my final conclusions, my opinions.'*

ARENDT, 1968:241

Arendt's quote above draws attention to the importance of engaging the imagination in this process of considering the perspectives of others. The success and sustainability of collaborative work lies in the hands of the individuals working in the room together. Their relationships are informed and shaped by the collaborative structure and culture they are

working inside, but what actually leads to creative, dynamic and sustained collaborative work is how those individuals combine their skills and experiences into something which is more than the sum of their individual and organizational parts. Here, then, 'collaborative ethos' refers to the specific, negotiated working culture and agreements created between individuals in relation to how a programme of work moves forward – how they communicate, where and when they meet, the format of those meetings. This 'space between' is understood as separate and different to any agreed collaboration protocol and formal 'structure' (who holds the budget, what roles organisations and individuals take and so forth) and in my view, is the driver of any collaboration's impact and efficacy.

*We join spokes together in a wheel but it is the centre hole that makes the wagon move*

LAO TZU IN MITCHELL, 1988:11

Those individuals are inevitably going to be representing markedly different types of organisation and organisational cultures. Each will come to any collaborative interaction with a bottom-line sense of what they wish to see happen - their and/or their organisation's self interests. There will be inequalities built into that diversity, rooted in personal and organizational experiences of privilege or marginalization, of gender, status, education level, of access to resources, funding, social capital and so forth. All of these inevitable differences will lead to points of conflict (conflict of need, of view, of experience, of expectation) and it is in the negotiation of those conflict moments that the inherent inequalities are - or can be - revealed and addressed. More often than not, however, such points of difference are rarely articulated clearly, either from a fear of conflict (often rooted in a lack of knowledge of how to engage with it constructively) or as part of conscious or unconscious power plays. These micro power-relations can also be understood as the 'boundary experiences' of collaborative work as referred to by Crosby & Bryson (2010) and need to be addressed with clarity and creativity in the moment. This demands leadership (though not necessarily hierarchical), elicitive facilitation skills and above all, a previously established ethos of openness and respect as part of a working agreement co-created by those in the room, starting from a baseline of equality of experience and knowledge. Where this is the case, there is the chance to build a level of respectful interaction with difference that will sit at the heart of cross-cultural collaboration (Wilkinson & Jagoo 2014). Without it, festering self-interest and

resentments will remain, with the potential to undermine the stability, resilience and consistency of a collaborative structure, and especially where there is mistrust evoked by a sense of ‘colonization’ of the work of smaller, closer-to-the-ground organisations in order to deliver hidden and political agendas (Murphy & Arenas 2010).

*‘Difference cannot simply be formulated as negotiation of culturally diverse groups against a background of presumed homogeneity. Difference is the recognition that knowledges are forged in histories riven with differently constituted relations of power.’*

MOHANTY, 1989:181

In this study, the terms ‘collaboration’ and ‘multi-sectoral collaboration’ are used interchangeably and refer to *‘the linking or sharing of information, resources, activities, and capabilities by organizations in two or more sectors to achieve jointly an outcome that could not be achieved by organizations in one sector separately’* (Bryson et al., 2006:44). In their work, Bryson et al make a distinction between planned collaboration (understood as generally top down) and emergent collaborations (seen as bottom up), different both in nature and impetus and as a result, each bringing different challenges to process, practice, structure and governance (Crosby & Bryson 2010). However, as scholars point out, the terminology around collaborative working is widely varied, stretching from cross-sector partnerships through to multiparty or multi-sectoral collaboration, collaborative governance, interactive governance and network governance (cf Armstead et al. 2007; Dewulf & Elbers 2018). Whatever terminology is used, multi-sectoral collaborations inevitably include a range of interdependencies, uncertainties, circularities and conflicting stakeholder needs, rooted as much in past histories as current issues and social and political environments. In their work on cross-sector collaboration and voice, Daymond and Rooney (2018) describe such collaborations as social phenomena, made up of interconnected entities and elements that can include pre-existing networks of multi-directional relationships, norms, power dynamics and conflicts that stretch across individuals, groups and organisations (cf Thomson & Perry, 2006; Bryson et al., 2006; Ansell & Gash, 2008; Emerson et al., 2012 in Daymond & Rooney, 2018). One aspect that distinguishes collaborative work from cooperative partnerships is the clarification of differences in order to successfully combine skills and experience. Highly collaborative teams demonstrate

ongoing negotiation of their values, ideology and cultural background to develop a shared complex constitution (Robbins et al, 2013).

An increase in research on cross-sector collaborations over the last decade acknowledges their rise in number and significance, although it is only recently that various literatures have begun to address how to hold such collaborations together (cf Dewulf & Elbers 2018). The limited exploration of the internal mechanisms of cross-sector collaboration in practice has led to calls for more research into the impact of differing perceptions of collaboration partners on collaboration outcomes and into the disconnect between strategic and operational levels of a collaborative venture (Kokx & van Kempen 2009; Kokx 2011). Kokx draws attention to how a lack of understanding of and between different self-interests in a multi-sectoral collaboration can lead to its rapid disintegration and/or poor or inadequate delivery. The struggles of large cross-sector infrastructure projects to engage the range of voices and interests have been documented in studies of housing developments in the Netherlands, showing how issues of power quickly emerge in that process (Teernstra & Pinkster 2015). Dewulf and Elbers go further, pointing out how inequalities characterise much cross-sector work, even where there is an overt commitment to inclusivity. Inequality can only exist in situations where power is exercised, and whether less powerful or marginalised actors genuinely obtain more access to power sources as a result of 'collaborative' working is questionable (Woodhill & Vugt, 2011). Other studies echo these concerns, calling for more research into vertical and horizontal power relations within and across collaborations (Davies 2009, Kokx 2011) .

Groups we belong to and work within are porous and dynamic entities subject to constant shifts and shocks as the world around us turns and need flexible and adaptive ways of dealing with that continuous process of change. All kinds of groupings – families, at work, in communities - construct and reconstruct themselves through debate around conflicting worldviews (Lederach 2005), a perspective that underpins an understanding of conflict as a normal social occurrence. How we engage with such conflicts relates to our internalised framings of what we think conflict is and where it might lead (Dietz et al. 1989, Charkoudian & Wilson 2006), constructs based on our upbringing, our values, our life experiences and the social norms around us. They define what kinds of social situations and ways of communicating we consider as conflictual, including how and when a conflict starts and

ends. These framings for conflict are primarily constructed in our youth and then generally go unrecognised and therefore unchallenged as we proceed through life and into collaborative work spaces (Golec & Federico, 2004). In his study of belonging and Britishness, for example, Edvayne (2011) argues that one root of negative metaphors and attitudes to social and community conflict in the UK can be traced back to the ancient Greeks. Aristotle and Plato in particular proposed that 'harmony' should be the goal in social and political relations although others, including their contemporary Heraclitus, proposed that social conflict arising from discord was a sign of a normal, flourishing society and that inner consensus within a group can be uncreative and even dangerous.

Given the high levels of probability of conflict occurring within collaborations, and with potential for that conflict to turn destructive if not violent, this thesis draws on peacebuilding and conflict transformation theory and practice for ideas about building and maintaining sustainable collaborative structures that encompass multi-level actors and organisations. As Paffenholz outlines (2013), critical peacebuilding studies emerged from the foundation scholarship of Galtung, Curle, Freire and other early conflict scholars with an important turn to the 'local' and bottom-up theorising (cf Lederach 1997, Miall et al. 1999, Richmond 2011, Paffenholz 2013, Ramsbotham et al. 2016). This engagement with the local in any attempt to broker lasting peace agreements had similar rationales to those outlined above in urban planning and collaborative literatures, namely the recognition that local actors held important pieces of the puzzle. Conflict transformation theory and practice focuses on the rebuilding of civil society in post-violent conflict zones, and within that context leading theorist practitioner Jean Paul Lederach outlined the need for a resilient core structure as a stabilising influence in otherwise volatile situations. He proposed that attention should be given to building and maintaining 'transformational platforms' made up of locally-based collaborations of diverse and multi-level actors and which acted as central decision-making and delivery hubs in unpredictable and chaotic environments (2003). The vision was that these sustainable platforms for peace would be resilient while remaining flexible enough to shift and change in a responsive fashion to local need as it arose, although Lederach later acknowledged that perhaps not enough attention had been paid to maintaining and supporting these structures once in place.

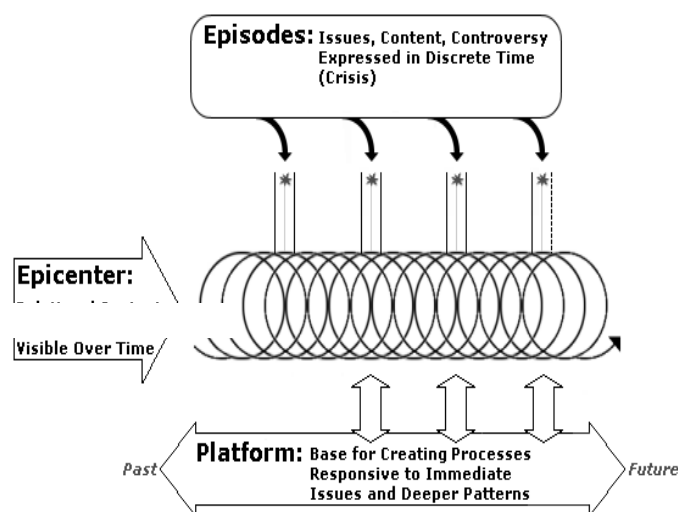


*'The aim is the generation of continuous, dynamic, self-regenerating processes that maintain form over time and are able to adapt to environmental changes. Such an infrastructure is made up of a web of people, their relationships and activities, and the social mechanisms necessary to sustain the change sought. This takes place at all levels of the society.'*

LEDERACH 2003:241

The idea of 'all levels of society' is significant for Lederach whose work includes extensive challenge to top-down hierarchies and decision-making, known in international conflict resolution processes as Track I and II diplomacy. He and others have argued extensively for the need to include actors at all levels in the negotiations, recognising that those on the ground living in contested environments had the most knowledge and influence on how any given course of action could and should unfold. For this reason, a conflict transformation approach includes all parties in a conflict at the table, including local actors whose experiences and networks are seen as essential to brokering any lasting agreements. This throws up its own challenges akin to managing the inherent inequalities in multi-sectoral and cross-cultural collaborations, with the need for a nuanced, complex understanding of power structures in civil society where sustainable infrastructure processes are in play (Paffenholz 2013:17) and an awareness of hidden and/or unrecognised pools of local agency and resistance (Chandler 2013).

FIGURE 1 LEDERACH'S TRANSFORMATIONAL PLATFORM



Notwithstanding these important caveats, I contend that the concept and learning in relation to the building and maintenance of such structures has much to offer those interested in the sustainability of collaborative working. Yellowthunder et al. have worked on applying the transformational platform idea to a local, non-violent context in relation to complex and intractable community conflicts in the United States and suggest that such a hub could be located in a single organisation just as much as a large-scale multi-agency collaboration. They used Community Resolve (the delivery organisation in this UK case study) as an example of such a hub in a socially complex urban environment, generating solutions to short-term needs at the same time as working on strategic long-term structural and systemic change across the city (Yellowthunder et al., forthcoming). In these contexts, importance is given to understanding the impact of cultures on multi-sectoral group dynamics, which LeBaron (2006) describes as *'underground rivers that run through our lives and relationships, giving us messages that shape our perceptions, attributions, judgments, and ideas of self and other...'*. The implication here is that alongside developing a more fluid sense of self, successful (as in sustainable) collaborations need to develop what LeBaron terms 'cultural fluency' - a heightened awareness of different cultural frames and out-of-sight contexts for those working in collaboration, both in the room and beyond, as well as an active awareness of power dynamics.

Extrapolated to a local arena, then, Lederach's concept of a platform can be understood as an ongoing collaboration of agencies guided by a mutual sense of purpose working across multiple spheres of influence and across local social and power hierarchies (Francis 2004, Bloomfield et al. 2006). Creating and maintaining such platforms is challenging, not least because the authority and legitimacy which allow them to flourish and sustain has to come as much from civil actor support as from statutory authorities and bureaucracies (Meek & Newell 2005). All those involved in such collaborations, from local residents to community organisations, voluntary and statutory sectors, consultants, educators and others, come with markedly different types of knowledge and working culture (Meek & Newell 2005). However, in their work on cultural competency in interdisciplinary academic teams, Reich & Reich (2006) suggest that the liminal spaces that lie between disciplines and experiences are sites of active learning and development, highlighting the excitement and creativity implicit in synthesising dramatically different viewpoints and 'pooled thinking'.

### **Journal entry, August 2017 – Collaborating with strangers**



I arrive in the dark and wake next morning to incredible views, vultures circling overhead, perpendicular drops from the side of the tiny road. Life in the bandit village, a hamlet high up in the Spanish Pyrenees. I have signed up to a living experiment in collaboration – 12 days with a group of 10 strangers to explore together the concept of practical democracy.

After breakfast there's a suggestion of structure for the days but no content - we make that ourselves. Over the course of an hour, we all write on post-its 4-5 things we can offer / request and then work in silence to cluster them into a programme. The outcome is incredibly exciting, from mutually facilitated discussions to embodied learning and daily meditation and reflection practice to spending a night on the mountain on our own, no tent, no company, no phones; from political films and discussion to 1-1 radical friendship walks and reclaiming public space in the local town square. We start in immediately. We do not stop for 12 days, cooking, cleaning, caring for each other, sharing skills and experiences, managing ourselves and the group dynamics, reflecting as we do so on the creation of culture, of group norms, of the impact of disruptions, of people leaving and coming, on politicking – the act of doing politics at a daily level. We discover we are activists, thinkers, facilitators, artists, squatters, radical politicians from France, Spain, Italy, Austria, Sweden, Britain, aged 23-57. I am the eldest.

So much was bound to occur – struggles between individuals; examples of how conflict arrives in the room and is managed; the impact of prior relationships; the formation of group culture, ethos, identity and purpose; the group's relationship to the wider system, before, into the future. I watch myself and others replay common patterns in relation to conflict – withdrawal, silence, refusal – and gain a profound insight into how my early experiences of family continue to impact when I'm feeling unsafe. I leave the space changed.

## Embracing complexity

*‘Socially situated, imperfectly knowledgeable actors stumble upon ways of doing things that seem to work and seem to fit with their other concerns. Authorities patch together workable solutions to problems that they see and can get to grips with. Agencies struggle to cope with their workload, please their political masters, and do the best job they can in the circumstances. There is no omnipotent strategist, no abstract system, no all-seeing actor with perfect knowledge and unlimited powers. Every ‘solution’ is based upon a situated perception of the problem it addresses, of the interests that are at stake and of the values that guide action.’*

GARLAND 2001:26 IN HUGHES & ROWE 2007

Openness, fluidity and adaptability, advocated by Lao Tsu over 2000 years ago, are all characteristics of complex systems, and especially in relation to sustainability. As Garland summarises so well above, chaotic, unpredictable and multidirectional experiences of delivery and collaboration in community-facing cross-sector programmes are the norm. An ability to accept the world as uncertain, contradictory and conflictual requires resilience in individuals as well as in the collaborative structures that surround them, resilience that needs to be actively fostered and developed (Hendrick 2009). In his call to imagine complexity as a friend rather than an enemy, Lederach pointed to a key recurring inquiry in this thesis: how might a capacity for fluidity at a personal, organizational and collaborative level free us from fixed mental shackles and open the door to emergent and creative ‘new thought’? Understanding ourselves and the world/s around us as consistently changing, created in the spaces between us, could perhaps enable individuals to embrace high levels of both differentiation (that is, a spread of multiple interests, abilities and aims) alongside the successful integration of goals, thoughts, feelings and actions (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996).

A world functioning normally on a chaotic edge (Gilchrist 2000) is not so much about fixed objects, certainties that we can order and measure, but more about a constant ebb and flow of interaction (Rovelli 2014). For Kuhn and Woog (2007), the recognition that all things are in flux at all times – individuals, groups, environments, organisations – leads directly to their suggestion that enquiry into spaces of human interaction should therefore focus on the

dynamics of interaction rather than on the understandings or characteristics of static entities or individuals in themselves.

*'Complexity theory is not a matter of importing ideas from 'the hard sciences' into the consideration of the social, although some of the terminology of nonlinear dynamic theory can be rather useful to us. Rather it involves thinking about the social world and its intersections with the natural world as involving dynamic open systems with emergent properties that have the potential for qualitative transformation, and examining our traditional tools of social research with this perspective informing that examination.'*

BYRNE 2005:96

Although still in its theoretical and methodological infancy in the social sciences (Smith & Jenks 2006), complexity thinking is seen by many as a useful vehicle to address fundamental questions about the nature of systems and social change (Nicolis & Prigogine 1989; Walby 2006; Montuori 2012). It is theoretically flexible enough to analyse social interconnections without the reductionism of earlier systems thinking (Walby 2007) which struggled to accommodate the interdependence, inter-connectedness and unpredictability of the living world. In this thesis, I am following Walby in selecting insights from across different aspects of complexity thinking, rather than importing or transplanting any one strand in its entirety and unapologetically employ complexity metaphors in this research. The making of metaphor is part and parcel of using the imagination, itself the fundamental engine of meaning (Fauconnier & Turner 2002; Hazy et al, 2007). Given that a complexity paradigm requires such a shift in how humans understand their interactions and world around them, I follow Kuhn (2007) in considering them to serve a useful function in the context of social science research of opening up how we approach human interactions and how we go about researching them.

*'Language used [in research] is of critical importance. Images and metaphors constructed through language are integrally bound up with worldview, and function as a means of classifying our experiences in the world in many different ways and at many different levels. A complexity approach to social inquiry enables different research images and processes.'*

KUHN 2007:174

A key focus of this study is on the metaphor and identification of emergence in relation to group interactions. Emergence is a term which is loosely used and is not new (cf in-depth exploration of the term in Corning 2002). It was first introduced in 1875 by philosopher George Henry Lewes who was an early sceptic of positivism and who used it in the context of describing cause and effect. Where two separate causes combined were observed to simply add to each other or mix together, the effect was referred to as 'resultant'; where such a combination resulted in novelty or heterogeneity, suggesting that the property of the whole was more than the sum of its parts, this became referred to as an 'emergent' effect (DeLanda, 2012). In time, this train of thought and experimentation led to a questioning of the established 'same cause, same effect, always' formula for linear causal relations and opened up the route to nonlinearity being understood as the norm and linearity as the exception. In this non-linear understanding of human interaction, where our impact and influence transcend spatial or temporal distance, everyday connections are understood as being impacted by the broadest of contexts, from past and potential future scenarios to cognitive and emotional experiences.

Transposed to the social sciences, then, the essential character of complexity-based knowledge is that it is an interdisciplinary understanding of reality as dynamic and formed of complex open/adaptive systems with emergent properties and a potential for transformation (Byrne 2005). To understand a system, the focus needs to be on the interactions among and between the parts of a system and their environments rather than on the individual parts alone - as Corning (2002:26) puts it, *'the 'whole' is not something that floats on top of it all'*. In her comparison between classical and complexity paradigms in social science inquiry, Nijs (2014) suggests whereas a classical understanding of systems theory is rooted in linearity, with anomalies stabilised via negative (deviation-reducing) feedback loops, complexity sees systems as permeable and non-linear and which self-adjust via positive (virtuous or vicious) feedback loops. For her, complexity-informed inquiry is rooted in a process view of the world as dynamic, self-organising and emergent, where the researcher worldview is fully acknowledged and where the relationship between the knower (researcher) and known (participants) is seen as the crucible of values and multiple truths co-identified during the inquiry process. The impact this has on a systems methodology, whether in the world of research or of practice, is that it stresses the importance of qualitative, site-specific approaches which are iterative, respectful of the diversity of

understandings that that brings. Any data collected is recognised as co-produced and always subject to the researcher's interpretation.

The idea of knowledge as always contextual and therefore local lays down a challenge to the idea of knowledge as being universally applicable (Cilliers 1998; Byrne 2005), as well as drawing attention to how knowledge is produced. Many empirical studies of collaborative work rooted in classical systems thinking focus on the dynamics within a single organisation (Bryson et al. 2006). This study is more focused on understanding open systems through the lens of social process (Nijs 2014), looking at the dynamics of multi-sectoral working beyond the experiences of a single organisation. In the hunt for pragmatic, experimental research approaches that acknowledged the impact of a wider social context, I encountered the concept of researching human experiential space. Kuhn and Woog's (2007) work builds on Dimitrov and Ebsary's (1998) definition of human experiential space as being relentlessly dynamic and chaotic, where future patterns of interaction are unknowable and where small changes in personal or group narratives can create exponential change and impact on everyday life.

**Journal, April 2017 Reflections on jazz - human interaction, complexity, improvisation**

Note to self: *'this could be a description of Lederach's platform...'*

(from Barrett, 2012) Saying yes to the mess. At its best ... continual dialogue and exchange; a flow of ongoing invention; a combination of accents and changing harmonic patterns that interweave. Continual streams of activity; listening to each other; enough shared awareness of common task to track group progress but not burdened by excessive demands/structure. The transforming power of positive expectation... accepting the idea of disorder, always on the brink of the unknown and being prepared for 'the leap'. An iterative approach, not linear growth – try something, review, try again, discover as you go. Followship, not leadership, with musicians stepping back in turn to let another through.

Above all, risk taking from a place of safety, a 'holding environment' (Winnicott; Kegan 1982; Meyer & Land 2006) created for each other through:

- holding on: an environment which recognises and affirms an individual's way of understanding and interpreting the world;
- letting go: challenging individuals (organisations? collaborative structures?) to extend, reframe, rethink the way they construct the world using their intuition;
- staying in place: holding enough status quo to make sense of what happened, while allowing enough space for new enquiry.

## Conclusion

This chapter has loosely woven together a number of threads, drawing on practical experience and personal interest as well as academic concepts from conflict transformation theory, psychosocial studies, management and collaboration literatures and social science complexity thinking. The key question it poses is: if we understood ourselves and the world/s around us as fluid and created in the spaces *between* us, how might that change our idea of 'difference'? It suggests that in those 'spaces between', there is opportunity for new thinking to emerge and for new realities to be forged as what is generally hidden is made clear, and a chance arises to explore and better understand the other. How we structure and inhabit those moments will make the difference between future relationship, and therefore to the creativity and quality of sustained connection and collaborative process. Multi-sectoral collaborations are now major deliverers of community infrastructure services and are already documented as running into issues of collaboration and sustainability. Wherever diverse groups get together, there is a need to learn to work collaboratively respectfully together, and if they don't find ways to do this, the collaborations will ultimately fail even if they have initial success.

The research design that follows looks at the quality of relationships in groups involved in shared tasks. One way of doing this is by studying 'the space between' participants, the ephemeral and intangible nonverbal interactions that form such a large part of human experiential space. As I set out in the following two chapters, I study that 'space between' with interactive research methodologies designed to elicit emergent thinking in the groups. I then analyse those interactions looking for indicators of the group dynamic – where it is working well, where it is working less well, and indicators of how a group can re-orientate itself to improve energy in the room. In Chapter 7, I return to how learning from these collaborative taskgroups might be integrated into plans for sustainability for collaborative work in the future.



## Chapter 3:

### Methodology 1 - Investigating ‘the space between’

In the previous chapter I sketched out the theoretical concepts, understandings and experiences that led to the development of the research question at the heart of this study: *‘How might a focus on ‘the space between’ contribute to a theoretical and applied understanding of multi-sectoral collaboration dynamics?’*. In this chapter, I set out the mixed methods research design used for this study as well as its rationale and underpinning research methods and methodologies. As described in Chapter 1, I came into the PhD from the world of practice and had initially wanted to look more closely at the work of the organisation I founded in Bristol. I wanted to reflect on our experiences of work in challenging community settings through the lenses of international conflict theory, psychosocial literature and organisational/management literature relating to cross-sector collaboration. Above all, I wanted to focus on how costly a negative framing of conflict is in terms of money, time and wellbeing for individuals, organisations and agencies of all sizes. I was particularly struck by some of the core principles and metaphors found in emergent thinking and in particular by the idea of fluid, multi-threaded and constantly changing dynamics situated in time and place that defied linear planning and evaluation. For me, this framing for the everyday world matched exactly the organisation’s experiences of community cross-sector collaborations and provided an excellent way of better understanding the complicated interface between the delivery dynamics we encountered on the ground and the static, linear systems that were commissioning and evaluating the work we did.

As explored in Chapter 2, all knowledge is understood in this study as context specific and bounded, and that it is at the boundaries of knowledge that new insights lie. As the idea of ‘theory’ implies both implicit and explicit boundaries, theory production is no exception to this. Adopting a theoretically pluralistic approach for the research seemed coherent with its transdisciplinary nature, allowing me into the space between different types of knowledge as well as different disciplines (Midgley 2011). I have employed a range of both methodologies (understood here as theoretical ideas used to justify using particular methods) and methods (techniques used to achieve a given purpose) to explore dynamics in

group interaction, generating multiple sources of data. These include both nonverbal and 'unseen' elements of the group communication alongside textual analysis of participant interactions, observations and reflections. This broad theoretical pluralism applies to all aspects of the multi-stage research process, informing the research question as much as data collection, data analysis and the selection of findings.

Below, I set out the various key theoretical paradigms that underpin the research design, outline the design itself and summarise the data collection process. I also reflect on some specific aspects of the research design which emerged as the research progressed, including working with case studies, the use of psychodynamic observation and working with a cross-cultural research team. The chapter concludes with a review of research protocols, including ethics. In Chapter 4 (Methodology 2), I focus on the analysis stage of the research, including data integration and the multiple analysis frames employed.

## The research frame

The premise of this research is that focusing on the space between individuals and organisations working in collaboration will provide fresh insights into collaboration dynamics and so contribute both to the literature on collaborative working as well as to collaboration sustainability. By making visible the group dynamics surrounding 'hot spots' in group interactions (Wrede & Shriberg 2003; MacLure 2013), it becomes easier to acknowledge and work with points of conflict points that will inevitably arise with more intentionality. The research was designed to provide data for that intentionality by engaging with beneath-the-surface dynamics in the group interactions (Clarke & Hoggett 2009) and by identifying both nonverbal and verbal indicators that led into and out of moments of conflict or disruption. To achieve this, I set out to engage with the participants and the data they generated in an open and un-predefined way. I was fully aware that this would lead to less coherent findings than in traditional structured or semi-structured empirical research but felt that it could result in a more accurate representation of the messy, complex nature of the researched environment (Nijs 2014). The approach uses what was to hand to stay to pragmatically engaged with the multiple ideas, perspectives and themes that informed the research design

and which emerged in the research space (Hetherington et al 2018). Below I summarise key areas of theoretical influence on the research design.

### Complexity influences

The impact of complexity thought and metaphor can be seen throughout the final research design which increasingly focused in on emergence as a key concept. As already discussed, there is no single complexity theory but rather a loose collection of work which encompasses a broad sweep of definitions and approaches to exploring social systems, ranging from the purely mathematical to the determinedly qualitative (Walby 2007). In this piece of research, I approached collaborative working structures as co-evolving complex systems with an interest in how flows of energy and information caused entities in the system to interact with their immediate and wider environments.

*‘Hegel said that true thinking is thinking that looks death in the face.  
We could add that true thinking is thinking that looks disorder and  
uncertainty straight in the face.’*

MORIN 2002:329 IN SMITH & JENKS 2006

At the heart of this research design is the concept of ‘the space between’, built in to the research design just as much as into the overall conceptualisation of the PhD by focusing on the interactions, processes and relationships within and between individuals and organisations at different 'levels' or scales of an open collaborative system (DeLanda 2012; Kuhn 2009). This 'space between' approach was open ended, employing research methods which allowed participants to take the conversation where they wanted it to go rather than being directed by the use of interview and focus group schedules. In the research design I built in data collection exercises that I hope would highlight moments where communication in groups got so 'sticky' that it teetered on the brink of dysfunction, including a well-known negotiation exercise used in development and team building work. By exploring whether similar dynamics and strategies for dealing with any conflict points were used across each individual collaborative system (though not necessarily the same dynamics or strategies), I could investigate whether patterning and fractal dimensions found in all complex systems can be seen in these collaborations.

## Psychosocial studies

Psychosocial studies explore how our individual and group 'internal' worlds and coherence cope with the interface with our shifting, uncertain external environments, and how social, historical and psychic forces intersect to shape both individuals and societies (Hollway & Jefferson 2000). Through a psychosocial lens, research encounters are a space of nonverbal and unconscious interaction where research methodologies focus on the understanding of the relationship between individuals and their environment, both of which are considered are equally important (Clarke 2002). By linking individual and collective dimensions of reality, a holistic understanding of psychological and social processes can emerge during the research process (Becker & Weyermann 2006). In this study, I approached the research environment as far more than purely discursive, alive with highly influential nonverbal and 'beneath the surface' dynamics including those between researcher and 'researched'. Clarke and Hoggett (2009) point to the emotional investment of the researcher in their choice of topic and design and to the resulting impact on the affective relationships in the research space. Recognising this was an issue for this piece of research, I built mechanisms into the design that minimized my impact on participants, allowing the groups to self manage as well as encouraging reflection on my own responses to the data collected through a psychodynamic observation process. Given my own close connection to the case study in the UK, the need for acute researcher awareness was paramount in this study which is why additional layers of researcher reflexivity were built into the design.

To access deeper levels of participant engagement, I employed interactive data collection techniques which allowed participants different types of reflection space, from thinking alone to working in pairs and engaging in whole group discussions. I was interested in data collection methods that were congruent with the skillsets of the training delivered by the two collaborative structures (facilitation, co-production of knowledge, negotiation of difference) and also wanted a design that minimized the idea of 'expertise' in relation to both the hierarchy of participant groups and in relation to the researcher/researched paradigm (Flyvbjerg 2006). Finally, I was interested in exploring how - and if - a research study could capture emergent thought processes in action, and especially in relation to maintaining positive working relationships in unpredictable, shifting environments.

Zooming in on a level of detail that focused on the micro social interactions between individuals when they work together in collaborative settings seemed increasingly useful. It enabled me to draw a clear boundary around the research aims so adding to its research credibility (Hetherington et al, 2018) and four key aspects took on an increasing importance in the design. These were: the interactions and dynamics between individuals and organisations focused on a shared goal; points of tension in the group process where communication ground to a halt; conscious and unconscious strategies individuals adopted in relation to such moments of clash; identifying knowing/doing' gaps at different points of interaction across the groups / collaborative systems.

## Mixed methods

*'The key to a research approach in which multiple methods are entangled is not to decide at the outset whether and how to collect and analyse data either sequentially or concurrently, but to use them in a responsive manner, documenting the ways in which they intra-act throughout.'*

HETHERINGTON ET AL., 2018:10

This research uses a mixed methods approach with the idea of generating as many different takes on the group interaction as possible within the limited scope of a PhD study. Creswell's influential typology of mixed methods research (2015) sets out three broad categories of mixed methods research design: convergent (where text-based/qualitative and numbers-based/quantitative data collection take place simultaneously, with integration often at the analysis stage); explanatory (a sequential approach, where a quantitative strand is followed with a qualitative strand to further understand the findings); or exploratory (where an initial qualitative approach is used as the basis for a further quantitative data collection round). In this study, I am primarily working with a convergent design but from an emergent perspective, and therefore there were iterative aspects of the research design that could not have been anticipated at its conception. Recent analysis of the increased use of mixed methods shows is that the majority of mixed methods research uses qualitative extracts to illustrate primarily quantitative studies, a direction of travel influenced by the dominance of 'evidence-based' research discourse in social science and policy making (Bazely 2002). This study goes the other way, with most data being qualitative in nature and quantitative elements evident in data generated through one of the group tasks as well as emerging

during the data analysis process. For some, however, there is no such thing as 'mixed methods research' but merely knowledge aims, with a focus not on design but rather on 'what I want to know and what I'll find out' (cf Sandelowski, 2016). Given the messiness of life (and research), many question whether a clear-cut binary division between 'qualitative' and 'quantitative' research makes sense or is even possible given the fuzzy-edged nature of the division between the two.

### Case studies and systemic action research

The decision to study the dynamics and patterns of interaction through the focus on 'the space between' entities rather than on the entities themselves lends itself to working at a local level with case-based research methodologies (Kuhn & Woog 2006; Flyvbjerg 2006). As Byrne (2005) argues, case-based action research engages in a dialogue with social actors and encourages engagement in action by both co-participants and the researcher, as opposed to the relative passivity of more traditional research approaches. The recognition of any piece of research as being co-produced knowledge is central to this way of working, as is the acknowledgement of the impact of the researcher's worldview on the final outcome. From a complexity perspective, this is no more than would be expected given that there will never be a single path or 'truth' to identify, simply a multitude of possible paths open at any one time.

*'The essence of the case in a complex frame is that cases are in themselves complex systems which are nested in, have nested within them, and intersect with other complex systems. So, for example, a city-region is nested within global and national systems and has nested within it neighbourhoods, households and individuals. Nesting is not hierarchy. Determination runs in all possible directions, not just top down. All these levels potentially have implications for all other levels.'*

BYRNE 2005:105

The aim here was not to compare two research sites but to study each as a system in itself, and then to see if patterns of interaction replicated themselves at different levels of a system. If so, my reasoning went, it might be possible to see whether these patterns replicated themselves at an individual, group, collaboration and wider societal level. Along the way, it was inevitable that comparisons across the four group would occur although this

was not the key focus of the design. Although case study research is sometimes critiqued for its potential to accentuate researcher bias (as in the selection of case studies to support an argument), others (cf Flyvbjerg 2006) suggest that it contains no greater bias toward verification of preconceived notions than other methods of inquiry and if anything, contains a greater propensity for falsification of preconceived notions rather than verification. As a result, *small-n* qualitative research is often at the forefront of theoretical development (Ragin, 1992:225 in Flyvbjerg 2006).

For Brydon-Miller (forthcoming), the co-generation of knowledge with local participants will always be richer and more robust than ‘outside’ researchers can achieve. This view echoes Donna Haraway’s argument *‘for situated and embodied knowledges and against various forms of unlocated, and so irresponsible, knowledge claims.’* (Haraway 1988:583 in Brydon-Miller) and is closely aligned with proponents of systemic action research (SAR). As research by, with and for people involved in a particular setting or situation, SAR seeks to equalise knowledge production and foster empowerment by all those involved through working with multiple inquiry streams and an underlying emergent paradigm. To see the true workings of systemic action, Burns suggests, we need to look at systemic patterns, social norms and power with a focus on distributive leadership as route to collective learning.

*‘We can never predict detailed outcomes but we can make judgements about the direction of travel when we can see more of the picture. Despite this, things will not happen as we expect, so we need a process that allows us to change course flexibly and quickly. Systemic action research is a vehicle for that.’*

BURNS, 2007:39

The iterative, systems-aware nature of SAR was a natural fit for my study and influenced my decisions to involve practitioners at all levels of the research system and through them, to address central issues of participation, decision-making, power and privilege.

## The research design

With these theoretical and design frames in mind, I developed an interactive, small-scale and mixed methods empirical study which brought together four taskgroups to collect text

and numerical data related to collaborative working. The research design was deliberately unconventional, influenced by a complex mix of professional experience, various literatures and a desire to investigate human experiential space through a complexity frame (Kuhn & Woog 2007). I understood this project as an opportunity to explore and test different methodologies and methods, and the resulting multi-stage design was conceived and executed as a deeply iterative process, responding to new ideas, emerging dynamics and fresh influences at each step of the way. Although this presented me, as the researcher, with specific challenges - such as remaining in a state of openness throughout, resisting internal and external pressures to be clear about what was going to happen and what results I was collecting - I saw it as an approach that was entirely consistent with understanding the world as fluid, dynamic and unpredictable. As research questions should drive design decisions (Guetterman et al, 2017), I kept my focus throughout the process by repeatedly returning to the central research question (see first paragraph of this chapter).

To address this, the design involved the collection, analysis and integration of both quantitative and qualitative data (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011) using both traditional research methodologies (observation, field notes, transcription and thematic coding) as well as others. I used the concept of 'coherent conversations' for example, seeing this as more in tune with the research paradigm than standard semi-structured interviews or focus groups (Kuhn & Woog 2007). Participants ( $n=21$ ) from two cross-sector collaborative systems, one in the UK and the other in the Netherlands, worked together in four interactive data collection groups. This resulted in eight hours of group interaction audio data, observational data, field notes, reflection groups and six hours of additional feedback data. I also drew on additional material from my journal, field notes and reflection group discussions.

### Sample and taskgroup formation

I employed a purposive sampling approach to identify two case study collaborative systems, made up of individuals connected to two delivery organisations working with other collaborative partners (Patton, 2002). This initial starting point led to participants from across the wider collaborative system for a second round of research.

Finding the first case study was straightforward as I could draw on the experiences and work programme of UK-based Community Resolve, an organisation I had built and worked with



for 15 years. While this posed complications for the research in relation to my positionality, this was mitigated to some degree by focusing on a single delivery project with which I personally had minimal contact - Community Resolve's contribution to a government-funded national training programme for community organisers between 2010 and 2014. I then looked for a second case study in the Netherlands to give me some perspective on the UK working environment and to provide an alternative collaborative system to investigate. Searching through organisations that I had previous links to through Community Resolve, I came across Inkr8, based in Amsterdam. Inkr8 were keen to be involved and shared a similar underpinning philosophy to Community Resolve in relation to how conflict should be approached. Both organisations also had experience of, and an interest in, challenging power dynamics in collaborative environments. Usefully, these two cross-sector collaborations were operating at different scales and levels of delivery, ideal for theory testing the idea of fractals and patterning across open complex systems. The UK collaboration stretched from frontline community-facing delivery to government ministers whereas the Dutch case study focused on local neighbourhood delivery, with schools, funders and commissioners supporting a single programme of work.

In consultation with me, both delivery organisations decided on which piece of work would be studied, choosing one that required working with a range of other organisations - funders, commissioners, training centres, evaluation teams and so forth. They then identified 5-7 individuals connected to them in a variety of roles, from staff and management committee members to freelance workers and invited them to take part in Round 1 of the data collection process. This involved attending a two-hour interactive and task-based session which was primarily self-organised. Both groups completed an identical programme of activities with one session held in English in the UK and the other in Dutch in Amsterdam. Through Round 1 of the data collection, a second group of 5-7 individuals from across the wider collaborative system in a variety of roles and organisations were identified and invited to take part in Round 2, approached by the organisations themselves. The ease of finding participants to take part in the research, and especially in Round 2 where participants had a more tangential relationship to the work delivered, is a testament to the positive reputations of the Round 1 delivery organisations.

Once participants had agreed to take part, I contacted them directly via email with more information and organised a date to meet. In all four cases, these meetings took place in neutral and easily accessible venues. Before each one, participants were provided with written information about the research in English and/or Dutch, with information on the researcher and research topic; the timeframes for the research; the level of participant involvement required; the sponsorship of the research by the ESRC; what use the data would be put to; the limits of confidentiality; how the data would be anonymised and stored; and how participants could find out more or register complaints about the research process. They were also sent an agenda for the meeting in both English and Dutch.

Participants across both collaborative systems had a mean age of 47.5 years, and 65% were female (*Table: Study sample*). All of the participants had their own particular role in the collaborative network although the length of time participants were involved differed between the UK (10-36 months) and in the Netherlands (6-18 months).

To allow the greatest possible freedom for participants in how they expressed themselves, I decided from the start of the research that as much of the data collection as possible would be held in the first language of the majority of participants in any one group. Although there were exceptions to this in both the UK and the Netherlands (one Italian-born participant with exceptional English in the UK; one Greek and two Dutch Moroccan participants with fluent Dutch in the Netherlands), using the two languages allowed a much greater degree of engagement in the data collection sessions. However, it also created complications for the research process as my own very limited Dutch language abilities (initially) led to a lack of understanding of what was happening in the research space and an ignorance of nuanced cultural references in the groups' interaction.

Thinking such challenges through at an early stage of the research had a deeply enriching impact on the research process and led on to a more in-depth and reflexive way of working, bringing elements of ethnography, cultural anthropology and observation. It also brought strengths, giving me 'outside eyes' with which to engage with the data and the groups and a sharper focus on body language and nonverbal interactions in a way that is difficult when listening to talk. What it did mean, however, was that I needed to find and work alongside native Dutch speakers from the earliest stages of the research. In the end, a number of colleagues in the US, the UK and the Netherlands gave their time and energy to this study,

TABLE 1 STUDY SAMPLE (N=21)

	Round 1 Data collection groups		Round 2 Data collection groups	
	UK	NL	UK	NL
<b>Participants</b>	5	6	5	5
<b>Female/male</b>	4/1	4/2	4/1	3/2
<b>Mean age</b>	43	44	51	43
<b>Ethnicities</b>	White British (2) Dual heritage British (2) White Italian, resident in UK (1)	White Dutch (4) Dutch Moroccan (1) White Greek, resident in NL (1)	White British (4) Black US, resident in UK (1)	White Dutch (4) Dutch Moroccan (1)
<b>Roles:</b> <b>Round 1: in organisation</b>  <b>Round 2: in system</b>	Operations manager (1) Administrator (1) Quality assurance (1) Delivery staff (2)	Board of directors (1) Founders (2) Facilitators (2) Volunteer (1)	Civil servant (1) National programme manager (1) Programme training manager (1) Community organisers (2)	Local authority representative (1) School head (1) Housing association managers (2) Inkr8 facilitator (1)

all of whom were asked to sign a 3rd party confidentiality agreement before they had access to any data in line with University protocol. They included individuals in the roles of co-observer; translator and transcriber of Dutch data collected; a reflection facilitator; visualization rater team; data scientist; and graphic designer. Working on such a long and

solitary project as the PhD, these companions were of huge value both in terms of the depth of their contributions to the study and by keeping me involved and motivated through its various stages. Bringing a co-observer into the data collection sessions was particularly influential on the outcome of the research, opening the door to one of the most interesting and influential aspects of the research design – psychodynamic observation and reflection.

### Working with psychodynamic observation

There were several reasons for working with a co-observer, a model which draws on a research tradition much used in cultural anthropology to test the a researcher's assumptions and unconscious bias. The tendency for researchers to make snap and inaccurate assessments of others based on stereotypes and personal experiences without being aware

of this is increasingly documented in the literature (Hayes 2000; Greenwald & Krieger 2006). Although it is difficult to remove our own unconscious bias, working with a conscious awareness of this tendency and making efforts to mitigate it can strengthen research reliability. As I am not a fluent Dutch speaker, I recruited a co-observer through psychosocial academic networks in the Netherlands. Gertjan van Oldenborgh is fluent in English and a trained psychodynamic observer of organisations. To ensure parity across the study, the co-observer attended all data collection sessions in both the Netherlands and the UK in a non-speaking role, except when Dutch participants needed with help with the process. In having a second observer present with different cultural understandings and perspectives (Dutch, male and younger than me), I hoped to better understand what happened during the data collection sessions in both countries as well as my own responses to the data.

Following discussions with my co-observer (referred to as 'C-O' in extracts shared in the findings chapters), I decided to work with a modified form of psychodynamic observation which focussed on the beneath-the-surface dynamics in the research. This involved a team of two observers sitting in with participants in the research space (myself and Gertjan), taking minimal notes but focussing instead on observing participant interactions and holding an awareness of group dynamics and energy. The observer team met before each data collection session to confirm roles and to discuss any anticipated dynamics in the meeting, as well as after each one to share thoughts and reflections. To add an additional layer of reflexivity to the observation process, we then met with a reflection facilitator (referred to as RF in extracts in this thesis) within a week of each data collection session to reflect on our perceptions of what had occurred in the room. All discussions were digitally recorded and then transcribed.

**Journal entry, April 2016 – Researcher reflexivity: working with observer/reflection team**

We are all sunk into our own cultural framings, our preoccupations and assumptions. All research is entirely informed by how we, as individuals, see the world. Numbers, 0 & 1s, might be crisp, concrete, finite, not to be argued with, easy to hide behind. But influences are still there, in the research topics chosen and shaped, the sample, the books read and authors admired, the pressure of producing the evidence in a usable, digestible way. By inviting other perspectives into this research space, I feel my findings stand a chance of being seen as more robust and credible – by me, just as much as anyone else.

Observing group interactions in such a fully present fashion, so that the individual/group is aware of being observed, has been explored through the group relations tradition of intensive experiential learning (Lewin 1947). By studying how individuals perform their roles in the groups and systems to which they belong (work groups, teams, organisations or less formal social groups), attention is given to how groups move in and out of focusing on their task and the different defensive positions the group adopts based on unarticulated group phantasy. Working with an awareness of group dynamics in this way brought a heightened awareness of my own taken-for-granted cultural assumptions in relation to research and practice. As will be seen in the following chapters, it was this process which surfaced central nonverbal findings in the data, including the role of laughter, of silence and of the dynamic between majority and minority members of the groups.

### Mitigating positionality

Given my closeness to the UK case study and my distinct lack of Dutch language skills or cultural awareness, it was essential to work with individuals who could fill in some of my knowledge gaps. As set out earlier in this chapter, I am directly connected to the UK delivery organisation in this UK case study, as one of its original founders and current directors for over 15 years. To mitigate the researcher bias inherent to this positionality, I aimed for a high and transparent level of researcher reflexivity congruent with complexity informed methodologies. I took a number of steps in the research design to this end, including building a research design with a 'control' case study in another country, not as a direct comparison but with a function of mirroring the data collection process in the UK with colleagues I had known over several years. As described, this led to working with a Dutch-speaker co-observer in both countries and with a reflection lead who then worked with us both to become aware of how and where researcher values can skew the final data selected and of our unconscious bias that is inherent to any research endeavour.

This in itself led to some of the most interesting and insightful discussions in the whole research process, helping me surface more of my assumptions in relation to both the UK groups (who I knew too well) and the Dutch groups (who I understood too little). Working closely with both the co-observer and reflection lead highlighted differences in understanding between us and provided a more nuanced understanding of interactions in

the Dutch groups. Later in the analysis process (described in Chapter 4) working alongside Dutch nationals to rate mood and engagement of the participant groups proved particularly helpful and illuminating. What I considered a point of clash was not picked up by them, for example, whereas other moments in the data triggered strong responses in them but passed me by. On several occasions, this led me to reflect on how these were not just cultural differences in relation to language or nationality but also related to gender and age. I, as a native English speaker, was responding differently to both the dynamics in the UK groups (which I consistently rated lower than my Dutch colleagues) and to the interactions in the Dutch groups, where I was consistently more generous than them in my ratings for mood.

## The research process

In this section I outline the research process, designed to generate rich conversational data during four identically-structured group sessions. Paperwork relating to the data collection sessions can be found in Appendices 1- 3, including the informed consent forms participants signed in the room, an outline of the programme and instructions, and the values list used in Task 3.

Two data collection sessions were held in the UK and two in the Netherlands, each lasting two hours. All four followed an identical format, with each group working in their everyday language (although not necessarily everyone's mother tongue) and following instructions provided in English and Dutch as appropriate (*Table 2: Structure of data collection sessions*). The session format was designed to elicit social interaction as well as individual and group reflection, influenced both by John Paul Lederach's elicitive approach to conflict training (Lederach 1995; Maiese, 2004) and the principles of 'coherent conversations' (Kuhn & Woog 2007; Kuhn 2009). Lederach's concept of elicitive training relates closely to my interest in creating generative learning spaces and originally emerged as a challenge to the prevailing prescriptive skills training delivered in the international conflict world in the 1970s, which was built around the specialised knowledge of a trainer that was assumed to be both transferable and universal.

Lederach was specifically critiquing the lack of cultural awareness or applicability in such 'expert' training, citing how he, like others from the global north, initially used identical

training approaches when working in the global south until his participants helped him understand their vastly different contexts and worldviews. His elicitive approach rested on four key principles: that participants in any given setting should be seen as a key knowledge resource rather than passive recipients; that local, situated knowledge is the quickest route to understanding a situation and deciding on appropriate action; that building on local resources fosters self-sufficiency and sustainability; and that a process which encourages participation in identifying issues and appropriate responses is the route to empowerment and engagement (Maiese 2004). I combine these ideas of drawing on different types of knowledge and experience with Kuhn and Woog's 'coherent conversations'. Kuhn (2009:86) sets out how using group conversation may appear similar to running a focus group but differs in one important respect: while a focus group aims to have a conversation about a specific topic, a 'coherent conversation' is permissive, allowing space for participants to bring in what topics they will. This allows participants' own priorities and agendas to emerge during the research process and in so doing reveals as much about how people think as what they say, one route to indicators of emergent thought in groups. It also challenges the dominance of the researcher in the research process, leaving participants to take the discussion in any direction that seems right for them rather than fitting into a researcher's prior agenda.

## Data collection

**Round 1** The participants of the first round of data collection in both systems (the UK and the Netherlands) were all associates of two delivery organisations within a multi-sectoral collaboration. My role at both meetings was to welcome the participants; to collect the signed consent forms (Appendix 1); introduce my co-observer and the principles of observation; and to bring the group's awareness to time, if needed, as they worked through the agenda (Appendix 2). The informed consent form had already been emailed before the meeting to all participants and outlined how the research would be used, participants' rights to withdraw from the research and how they could get further information on the researcher or researcher if required (first port of call, my University of Bristol supervisor Dr David Sweeting). It also requested permission for audio and video digital recording and

TABLE 2 STRUCTURE OF TWO-HOUR DATA COLLECTION SESSIONS

	Rationale	Underpinning theory	Outputs
<b>Task 1</b> <i>Participants speak in turn, 2 minutes each</i> <b>Why are you involved</b> with work/research? How did you get to be involved?	Introduced everyone; ensured all voices were heard Settled the group Generated stories/ shared experience Built group dynamic	Elicitive training approach Coherent conversations rather than interview schedule Encouraging emergent thoughts/ direction	Connection across the group Collection of individual narratives
<b>Task 2</b> <i>Whole group c.40 minutes, materials provided</i> Any way you choose, <b>create a 'map' of the collaborative system</b> around the training work delivered, highlighting key connections and connectors	Set a collaborative task to work on Distracted participants from the experience of 'being researched' Used co-creation and interaction with visual imagery to deepen thinking	Based on 'conflict map' tool from conflict theory, used to gain overview of a conflict system and various relationships within it. Accessing psychosocial out-of-sight dynamics	Co-created 'maps' per system (four in total) Digital recordings of participants' discussions, negotiation strategies etc Observation data
<b>Task 3</b> <i>Structured, c.40 mins</i> <b>Exploring values</b> behind the work <i>Work alone:</i> Scan list of 100 values provided. Mark any that jump out. Number top 4. <i>Then in pairs / threes:</i> Share your 8/12 'top 4' words, discuss and agree 4. No new words. <i>Then as a whole group:</i> Discuss 4 values from each small group and agree 4.	Moved participants through different thought modes - individual, small group, larger group Generated participant reflections on values in their personal lives, at work and working in collaboration	Based on '4-word build' facilitation exercise, used to clarify language, distil ideas and build group cohesion Created artificial 'conflict' scenarios as participants negotiate under time pressures	Collected values across the two systems Allowed identification of emergent thought processes during task Surfaced examples of knowing/ doing gap, allowing comparison of values choices with behaviours
<b>Task 4</b> <i>Speaking in turn</i> <b>Final reflections:</b> what are your thoughts as you come to the end of this session?	Let participants digest a busy session Listen to each others' responses	Action research impact of group discussion on individuals, groups, collaboration, delivery programme	Evaluation of the process Evidence of impact plus leads for future research / follow up



photographs and to use the data in subsequent university-approved studies. The forms were discussed and then signed at the start of each meeting with the researcher present, in line with research protocols for the Universities of Bristol and Maastricht, Netherlands. Signed hard copies were safely kept and stored. Interestingly, Dutch participants were more concerned about signing the consent forms than UK participants, asking for reassurance about how the data would be used and confidentiality issues before doing so.

Both groups then self-managed their way through the tasks above following the written instructions in Appendix 2. All aspects of the discussions that followed were digitally recorded with full knowledge and consent. Although the data collection session format was identical in shape and instruction for all four groups, it contained one key difference for participants in Round 1 and Round 2. In both countries, participants in Round 1 were all connected through a single organisational culture and were working with (mostly) familiar and trusted associates. In Round 2, however, participants were drawn from across a range of different organisations and roles in the collaborative system and were generally working with individuals they knew far less well, if at all. My route to Round 2 participants was via the maps created in Round 1 of the research, marked as key connectors across the system and who were then approached by the Round 1 organisation to take part in the research. As I was interested in cross-system dynamics, including whether it was possible to see similarities of behaviour, patterns of interaction or influential discourse across the system, this structure worked well. However, it created an inevitable difference in terms of group trust between the two rounds, as I return to in the final assessment of the research design in Chapter 7.

**Between Round 1 and Round 2** After the first round of data collection, the recorded data collected was transcribed and translated/transcribed by the researcher (for the English-speaking group) and by a Dutch translator for the Dutch speaking group. As I was taking an iterative approach to the research the results of the values task from both meetings were analysed immediately with the selected values and any notable patterns of thought across the various stages collated into table form. Observations from the meetings were discussed and reviewed with ideas generated about the psychodynamic content of the groups subsequently written up. Follow-up meetings (also recorded) took place with both central

delivery organisations allowing me to collect feedback about participant reflections on the meeting, share ideas from the observation process and to review the maps each group created. This stage was important, as I was able to clarify my understanding of the systems maps co-created by the groups and also to identify potential participants for the Round 2 of the data collection. A summary of the data collected at both sessions was shared via email with participants in both country systems with requests for contact or feedback as desired. None was received.

**Round 2** Once participants had been gathered and a date agreed, two separate meetings were held, one in Bristol and the other in Almere in the Netherlands. It was noticeably harder to form research groups for Round 2 (although still not that difficult) in part because of participants' more tangential relationship to the delivery work itself. In the Netherlands, for example, several people dropped out just before the meeting date requiring new participants to be found. The meeting format was identical to Round 1 and was followed by data translation/transcription, reflection meetings and a synthesis of the values exercise. Although feedback meetings were offered to Round 2 participants, there was less enthusiasm in both systems. In the UK, most participants were by then working on different projects, and while work continued in Almere, it was agreed that the action research value had already been accessed through meetings already held. Inkr8, the Dutch delivery group, was interested but reluctant to draw further on reserves of goodwill with organisations who had agreed to take part in the research.

### Ethics and risk

This final section of the chapter touches on ethical issues that were considered as the research design emerged, and others which surfaced during the research process. It also looks briefly at the question of research authenticity and credibility, although I return to this in more detail in Chapter 7 when I analyse the strengths and weakness of the research overall.

The focus of this empirical research study was the dynamics of relationship and interaction across the two collaborative networks. From the start, both organisations central to the study saw the research process as a vehicle for deeper organisational reflection internally and across the collaborative structures they had worked or were working with. Most

participants in the study were professionals with limited emotional connection to the actual delivery programme, although the degree of detachment varied across the participant group with ethical implications as a result. To reassure those who took part that they could talk with complete openness, without compromising any working relationships or damaging interpersonal relationships, issues of confidentiality were discussed at the start of each data collection group and spelt out clearly in the paperwork provided to participants. Nonetheless, there was potential for areas of sensitivity to emerge during the course of the study, including different perspectives towards the joint delivery work held by collaboration partners; inter-organisational rivalries and competition; overt or implied criticism of collaboration partners; markedly different experiences of the value of the work; and accusations of malpractice, with potential impact on the reputations of those taking part in the study.

One example which emerged from the data was an unanticipated majority/minority dynamic in the interactions in both systems, with evidence of professionals 'othering' participants of different ethnic backgrounds. As a result, data presented at feedback meetings and in the findings chapters were shared with the utmost care, and where there were differences of opinion and approach in the data these were highlighted without compromising the confidentiality of the sources. Criticism of collaboration partners was another example and was more complicated to deal with, especially when it referred to individuals or organisations who had not taken part in the study. As a result, such criticism is not included verbatim in the findings but is integrated into the wider picture of shared and different values while being strictly anonymised.

During the analysis process, and especially in relation to the visualization project, a further consideration in relation to confidentiality emerged. While there was a desire to include audio clips of participant discussions in online findings so readers could judge group dynamics for themselves, this would have breached the spirit, if not the letter, of the confidentiality forms signed at the start of the process. To include such material would have required returning to participants to gain their consent, and would have thrown up considerable difficulties in relation to anonymizing the data – individual contributions as well as removing identifiable names, etc. An alternative approach was to include online audio clips of laughter only, as it is less identifiable for the individuals concerned and also less

revealing of wider contextual material. However, this would have required additional ethical approval from the university and also proved too time-consuming for this study.

As required at the start of the PhD process, I completed a risk assessment table at an early stage of the PhD which summarised any risks to the researcher, participants or the research itself (see Appendix 4). In the event, the 'very low risk' assigned to 'risks of everyday life' was wrong as I had not foreseen that I would become seriously unwell in 2017-18. Fortunately, the data collection process had been completed by then and it was possible to continue with the analysis stage of the research once I had fully recovered.

### Research credibility

As set out elsewhere, this research is exploratory and interdisciplinary, taking as its underlying research paradigm a complexity view of the world and of social science research. It employs mixed methods and a range of innovative and untried research methodologies, all of which pose issues for establishing its credentials as a robust and coherent piece of empirical research. So how does such a piece of exploratory research such as this gain its credibility? This study follows other complexity researchers in the social sciences (Byrne 2005; Kuhn & Woog 2007; Flyvberg 2006) in asserting that all data collected represents a unique moment in time, where context, thought, feeling, memory, impulse, imagination and experiences are fused in a particular response. The study draws legitimacy from its use of methodological pluralism (Richard & Cilliers 2001; Onwuegbuzie et al 2010), bringing together a number of methodologies and methods to collect and analyse the data while working iteratively and with an eye for emergence within that process.

Within a complexity frame, the understanding of causality is highly contingent (as in, local and dependent on context), complex (seldom based on any single specific cause) and multiple, with different causal combinations generating different outcomes (Byrne 2011). Emergence is a relational/structural and temporal concept of non-linear causation implying *'that something small and possibly unnoticed can have a large effect, which means it cannot be known in advance the level of granularity that would be useful to employ or the timescale over which phenomena emerge.'* (Hetherington et al. 2018:10). Given the many many variables that could have had an impact on the data in this study, from the warmth of room to history within the group, it is accepted here that such variables cannot be accounted for

in the findings and so they are not. Instead, the data is understood as a snapshot representation within a fluid, constantly shifting world, no more reliable than any other data collected in any other way. The credibility of this study therefore lies not in having every variable accounted for but in making plain the complex realities of human experiential space and engaging with the material collected as of a moment and not of a generalizable nature (Flyvberg 2006).

Among the biggest challenges in mixed methods research is articulating the process of integrating the different data sets in a meaningful and useful way. Sandelowski et al (2016) suggest the emphasis should be on how and why different types of data are brought together to illuminate the question being asked, a 'building' approach which uses the results of one form of data to better understand another. As the following chapters will show, this study works on exactly that principle and with a full commitment to researcher transparency as central to its credibility (Guetterman et al 2017). The point, in the end, is to generate data that provides multi-voiced insights into the research problem posed in a credible and coherent way. This chapter has set out how I went about this, employing a convergent mixed methods approach to collect visual, textual and numerical data and using both quantitative and qualitative approaches in the data analysis.

## Conclusion

In this chapter, I set out the theoretical underpinnings for my empirical research into 'the space between' those working together in collaboration. These included my commitment to theoretical pluralism and a complexity-informed research design in relation to both the different theoretical research frames I draw on and through the range of methods employed to operationalize them. Central to the research was a focus on creating an iterative and emergent research approach, allowing space for participants to shape the outputs of the research, as well as enabling me to approach the diverse types of data collected from multiple analysis directions. In the following chapter, I focus on the analysis stage of the research and on the unexpected outputs that emerged. I also reflect on the challenges and inherent excitement of engaging with such an open-ended research design. A full review of the strengths and weaknesses of the design can be found in Chapter 7.

## Chapter 4:

### Methodology 2 – An emergent research space

This second methodology chapter charts the unfolding of an emergent approach to the data analysis, involving the integration of data of very different types – visuals generated during the mapping task; numerical data generated in the values task, as individuals worked through a process of selecting four values from a list of 100; qualitative data generated by transcribing participant interactions across the two-hour sessions; transcripts from observation discussions before and after data collection; and my own journal of thoughts, leads, dead ends and moments of clarity and insight over a four year period. I decided to include a second methodology chapter dedicated to the analysis process because of a surprising development that emerged as I first listened back to the group interactions:

#### Journal, January 2017 – The idea of energy shifts

While transcribing UK Grp 2, suddenly had insight that I need to analyse texts according to levels of energy in the room. Maybe energy levels across the discussions? Participation levels – no. of times each person speaks, no. of words? Roles in the group? Praps distinguish between speech actions ('let's put N next to R'), reflections ('I was thinking about that earlier when...'), task-focused, etc etc ?? Amounts / reasons for / types of laughter; references to past history/ assumed shared knowledge (eg story of R- in the UK Gp2 data); How / when / why I intervened. Metaphors, imagery; silence; context – warmth of room etc.

I followed up this initial response to the recordings by exploring how 'energy' was or might be defined. My interest in how to visualize this ephemeral element in the group interaction took hold and over the months grew in significance until it became clear that it formed part of my findings. As a result, I summarise the process of creating visualizations of energy shifts here in this chapter, and also present that process as a methodological finding from the PhD in Chapter 7 as an original contribution to the literature with theoretical and applied implications (with lots of further work) for the research community as well as for those working collaboratively. As outlined below, the visualizations went on to form a platform for

the data analysis as a whole, and the chapter concludes with a reflection on the strengths and weaknesses of this innovative but very early-stage analysis method for qualitative data.

## Data analysis approach and integration

As stated earlier, I view all the data in this study as representative of a unique moment in time, collected in a specific context which informed the participants' responses to the tasks that were set. The participant sessions had been designed in such a way to generate open-ended and multi-levelled data, gathered at a conscious and subconscious level through discussion and reflection at an individual and group level. I was interested in the data patterns and disruptions, seen as much in the differences that emerged as in the similarities (Oliver, 2015). The analysis challenge was to draw these threads together into a single, meaningful piece of research while still recognising that the end product would always be just one of many, many possible interpretations. Because of the research design's complexity-informed frame, I did not feel under pressure to tie everything up into a neat and complete picture and was in fact interested in leaving threads open for individual interpretation from the reader. Nonetheless, the aim was to integrate the different types of data in such a way as to identify unconscious patterns of interaction in 'the space between' the participants of each of the two collaborative systems being studied and to create as credible and transparent a piece of research as possible (Stacey 2003; Shotter 2000; Kuhn & Woog 2007).

It was only by transcribing and consistently re-reading the transcripts, journal observations and copies of the observer discussions that I began to get a flavour of what I had collected. Sifting through the data, it became clear how richly varied it was. There were individual accounts and narratives woven through the various group discussions, tiny but complete:

*'A prime motivator in my life is always being safe and secure, I will never live in B-again where you can get shot on the street, you can get shot by police, and my mom, one of the first things she asks when I move somewhere is 'do you feel safe?' cos she knows that that's what I'm looking for. I always want to feel safe. And right now I feel safe on the boat, and in this country, that's something I need to feel before I can do anything, and it's that safety that is the idea of security...'*

From the mapping task, there were co-created images generated by participants as they thought and talked about the collaborative structure surrounding a specific piece of delivery (*Figure 2: Maps of the two collaborative systems*). These provided an extraordinary and unexpected visual insight into the hugely different dynamics of each group as well as acting as a device to encourage interaction and deeper levels of thinking. The values task also generated thick, multi-layered quantitative and qualitative data relating to how each participant moved from their original selection from a list of 100 values through to the final four that each group ended up with. There were fascinating insights into how emergent thought appeared in the research space, how individuals negotiated their differences, and in relation to power dynamics in the groups. There was also evidence of different strategies employed by participants across the two systems, in the UK and in the Netherlands, suggesting some compelling cultural framings that would benefit from further research as this study is far too small to generalise from.

Another form of data came from extensive transcripts generated by the reflexive psychodynamic process included to mitigate my closeness to the UK group and to counter-balance my lack of Dutch language and cultural awareness. These important and impactful discussions involved me, my co-observer and a reflection facilitator and challenged my preconceptions time and time again as our joint ruminations opened up my thinking:

*'Listening back to the recording of the session, we noted a sense of things being able to be said and not being said. The idea of what can you say, what is not said, led to a recognition in my own work – that there are only a few things that are said among all that could be said; then whole theories are built on those few things said and choices made based on that information. Things that are said take on a life of their own, as if the things that are not said are therefore not important – while in fact maybe those ARE the very things that you need to talk about, the things that are NOT said valuable for making fully considered decisions.'*

My problem was how to select from such a range of interesting and diverse data, and where to start. From the earliest stages of this mixed methods research design I was anticipating the collection of different types of data and integrating such a diverse and wide-ranging dataset in a meaningful way became the key focus of the data analysis process. Because of the methodological diversity taken, it was always anticipated that different types of analysis





## Analysing nonverbal data

One completely unanticipated analysis approach that emerged during the research process was the engagement with nonverbal data. In studies of prosody (the study of the tune and rhythm of speech and how these features contribute to meaning), classifications of nonverbal communication include kinesics (physical movement and behaviours), chronemics (temporal speech markers such as gaps, silences and hesitations) and paralinguistics, which are linked to the tone, strength or emotive colour of verbal communications (Gorden 1980 in Denham & Onwuegbuzie, 2013). Although the impact of nonverbal communication on group and individual interaction is well recognised, a systematic review of its use in qualitative research showed some 75% of studies sidelined this aspect of a group's dynamic in their findings (Denham & Onwuegbuzie 2013). Denham and Onwuegbuzie call for more focus on nonverbal interaction, suggesting that its inclusion can triangulate speech narratives, capture underlying messages, find patterns in the nonverbal behaviours that contradict verbal communication and in so doing, create additional insights and directions for the data analysis process. As I am not a student of prosody, linguistics or communication, my engagement with nonverbal data comes from a very limited knowledge base and nor was this study designed with a study of nonverbal interaction in mind. Despite these caveats, nonverbal indicators of group dynamics proved a fruitful starting point for the data analysis process.

I really began to engage with the idea of visualizing nonverbal interaction once the data collection stages of the research were complete and as I began the analysis. By exploring five minutes of interaction in each group in depth, each encompassing a field of tension in which different needs or views were negotiated (Hermans et al. 2016), I was able to focus on what types of verbal and nonverbal interactions caused a shift in energy levels and impacted a situation's escalation and de-escalation. Unpicking the ebb and flow of interaction in this way allowed me to identify possible indicators for how collaborations might engage with similar dynamics in a working environment, useful for breaking a negative spiral of interaction in a situation where communication had become stuck, for example.

The nonverbal analysis of the group interaction drew attention to the micro-power dimensions in the groups which I explore further through textual analysis in the second findings chapter (Chapter 6). In that chapter I focus on dynamics of power and privilege that

are present in the data and on their relevance to sustainable collaborative working. The more aware and intentional collaborations are in surfacing and addressing power dynamics, the more likely it is that they will be able to sustain over longer time periods, and with more creativity and output. Again, this research is providing data for that intentionality.

### Visualizing nonverbal communication

While transcribing the discussions of the UK groups working on this task, I suddenly became aware that what was most interesting to me was not so much what participants said, but rather what was happening in the spaces *between* them, influenced just as much by the laughs, silences, sighs, asides and interruptions (nonverbal content) as by the actual words (verbal content). What struck me was how the nonverbal elements seemed to be shaping the energy in the group interaction, so allowing or preventing connection and the flow of ideas. While there are transcription conventions that note deeper levels of interaction (cf as used in critical discourse analysis), transcriptions are still text-based and do not easily convey the more ephemeral qualities in interaction such as tone, affect or the degree of connection in the group that were interesting me. As a result, I embarked on trying to capture a visual image of the shifting flows of energy in each group as they worked together which, I hoped, would generate further insights into the group dynamic.

To date, little attention has been paid to data visualization in qualitative research (Sloane 2009, Scagnoli & Verdinelli 2017), a term which is used here to refer to both an iterative process of visual thinking and interaction with data during the analysis stage as well as visual outputs from the data collection and analysis stages of the research (DiBiase et al. 1992). As soon as I started searching for examples of what I had in mind and how it might be achieved, I realised that displays of qualitative data are rarely - if ever - visualized through the generation of computer images. One systematic review of data displays in three prestigious qualitative research journals over three years showed no examples of computer-generated imagery, noting instead boxed text displays from flow charts and tree models to ladders; matrices; venn diagrams; and a variety of metaphorical and designed imagery (Scagnoli & Verdinelli 2013). In large-scale quantitative studies data visualizations generated by software often play a critical role in bringing to light subtle patterns that may not be immediately apparent in more conventional data analysis methods (cf Edsall et al 2000). I wondered

whether and how visualization could be similarly useful to unearth new understandings in small-scale qualitative studies such as this and if it might encourage exploration and recognition of pattern in the data. If successful, it would have the added advantage of avoiding the creation of 'mountains of words' to convey the essence of the data (Chandler et al. 2015). My ideas crystallised into an aim of creating a series of visualizations which illustrated energy shifts in each group over a specific time period. These would then be overlaid with a further, as yet undecided, nonverbal indicator of group interaction and mood such as silence, sighs, laughter, interruptions and so forth.

Achieving such a visualization project with so little precedent required a leap of faith. It became clear that giving the visualizations any credibility would require the use of an established instrument to convert qualitative text into numerical datasets. These datasets could then be fed through software to generate the images I was after, all of which required IT skills that I did not possess. As a result, I searched for a data scientist at the University of Bristol who might advise me and was lucky enough to engage the enthusiasm and assistance of Bobby Stuijzand at the Jean Golding Institute. It is important to acknowledge that the visualization outputs in this thesis would have been impossible without Bobby and later on, without inputs from the rater team and graphic designer Derek Edwards. Our roles were split: I generated the initial idea, created the numerical data for the software and worked on ideas around presentation while Bobby focused on finding and applying the data provided to suitable software. We met in person and over Skype every few weeks to discuss various issues that arose along the way, from interrater reliability to data presentation possibilities, text/audio integration, confidentiality issues and so forth. As this was an explorative and iterative process, it was anticipated from the outset that there would be difficulties and inconsistencies at each stage, and that the attempt at visualization might be abandoned at any point. As it turned out, we were both consistently impressed by the potential of what occurred and wanted to continue. However, with few previous examples of computer-generated visualized qualitative data to build on, this was largely breaking new ground and involved a continuous learning process over the course of two years or so, with multiple iterations, refinements, backtracking and sidestepping.

## Conceptualising 'energy'

A key starting point was to understand what it was exactly that I wanted to visualize and how it might be described. Building on the concept of 'energy shifts' that I had first come up with, I searched for a more precise definition of energy as well as for examples of instruments previously used to measure it. I came across Quinn et al.'s (2012) comprehensive review of cross-disciplinary literature in relation to research into 'human energy'. This noted that the study of human energy has had increasing attention from organisation scholars over past 15 years, in part because energy is seen as closely related to theories of motivation - different but related constructs. Quinn et al. call for further studies into energy to help clarify its use and meaning, as the term is currently used in wide and imprecise ways across numerous different disciplines. They group the main types of research into human energy into two distinct categories. The first, physical energy (a term drawn from the physical and biological sciences), refers to research into the potential energy stored in the chemical bonds that make up glucose/adenosine triphosphate (ATP). The second, energetic activation, refers to research that relates in some degree to the ways in which people feel energized, an affective quality that is close to the focus of this study. Energy activation is understood as a dynamic process with ebbs and flows, virtuous and vicious cycles, growth, collapse, equilibrium and oscillation. Quinn et al. suggest that the value in studying human energy patterns lies in the idea of energetic activation as a resource for broadening thought/action repertoires as well as affect-driven relationship building (Fredrickson & Branigan 2005 in Quinn et al. 2012).

These ideas are similar to those found in literature stretching back across the centuries, back to as early as Aristotle who used the term *energeia* to refer to activity which fuels one's potentiality (Witt 2003); to Freud's ideas of 'psychic energy' which fuels the mind and supports the accomplishment of tasks; and to Durkheim's descriptions of energy as a 'dimension of sentiments' created within a group environment which he noted had a greater energy than those created by individuals on their own. More contemporary studies of energetic activation highlight how it appears to be driven by human relationships (Cross et al. 2003), with a contagious nature (Barsade 2002) that draws individuals towards those they perceive as energisers (Baker et al. 2003). Realising what a huge and contested area of study I had stumbled into, I decided to avoid getting too distracted by discussions of terminology

but to focus instead on the project in hand – identifying patterns of flow of a visceral, tangible quality of positive energy, connection and interaction between individuals working together as a group. As a result, I use ‘energy’ and ‘energy shifts’ to refer to an affective, dynamic process of connection in ‘the space between’ individuals and/or an individual and the group.

### Generating the baseline visualizations

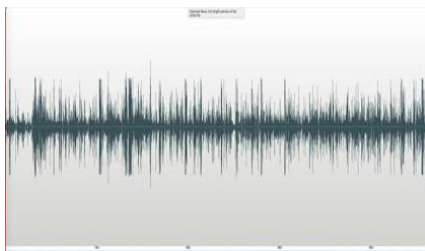
Before looking for a data scientist to work with, I had explored the possibility of using waveforms as a visual depiction of energy flows in the group and created a simple waveform showing sound intensity for each of the four collaborative map discussions using Wavepad v6.64 (*Figure 3*). I wondered whether the waveform might correlate to energy levels in the group interaction, for example spiking where the group interactions also become spiky. As a result, I selected points of the most intensity in each waveform to listen back to, to see what was happening at the moment in the group conversation and whether they provided a basic guide to the dynamics of the meetings. Although it was clear that the difference in quality of recordings meant that using the waveforms would never be scientific enough to build on, there was some degree of correlation. Based on these waveform experiments, I decided to focus the analysis of energy shifts in each group on a moment when the group was disrupted in some way, hoping that a visualization might show a distinct shift in pattern as a result. This then led to a second hypothesis, that the visualization of group interaction could in some way illuminate patterns of conflict escalation and de-escalation. However, to achieve the patterns I had in mind required some way of converting the qualitative data collected as digital recordings into numerical datasheets that could then be fed through computer software. At this point, my approach shifted from standard qualitative text analysis to exploratory mixed methods analysis involving elements of both quantitative and qualitative data analysis to produce an as-yet unknown and unproven end result.

To achieve a rigorous, systematic visualization I needed an instrument to measure energy in the space, as well as to work with a rater team to generate interrater reliability. This required identifying and refining an appropriate measurement instrument that could abstract rich information sources down to a couple of numbers (0 and 1). As a first step, I searched across numerous literatures to find related and similar qualitative studies and in studies of prosodic

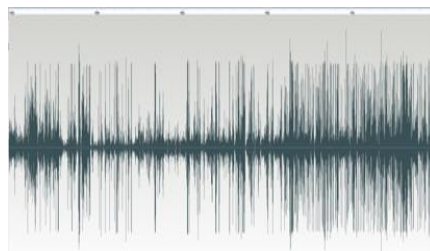
communication, I found instruments used to study conflict moments or 'hotspots' in meetings (Wrede & Shriberg 2003), to measure emotion in speech (Cowie & Cornelius 2003) and looking at nonverbal interactions in small groups (cf Gatica-Perez 2009). However, I found none that measured energy shifts or paid specific attention to 'the space between' participants in small group interaction (other than computer-analysed studies) until I came across instruments looking at affect, emotional contagion and group mood (Russell et al., 1989; Bartel C & Saavedra R, 2000; Lehmann-Willenbrock et al., 2011). These instruments were much closer to what I was interested in although they had been used in different contexts – Lehmann-Willenbrock et al. had used the instrument to measure large-scale intra-organisational team dynamics, for example. To develop this instrument to suit the purposes of this study, I asked four raters (two native English speakers, two native Dutch speakers) to test the matrix on six one-minute extracts drawn from across the four groups and which I selected through the waveform experiment.

Each rater was asked to listen independently to the six brief audio recordings with a focus on 'the space between' participants and to suggest up to 10 new 'codes' that for them

UK Gp 1



UK Gp 2



NL Group 1



NL Group 2



FIGURE 3 DISCUSSION WAVEFORMS

described the energy levels they heard in the audio clips. While challenging, this process was ultimately extremely impactful on the development of the instrument finally used, as one of the four raters drew attention to the emotional state of the group - listless, bored, upset - while the other three focussed primarily on types of interaction such as questioning, summarising, challenging and so on. This led to the integration of types of interaction, a synthesis of labels identified by the raters, into the previous scales of the Lehmann-Willenbrock instrument of activation, pleasure and mood (*Figure 4*). With these additional codes added to the instrument, I retested its viability by asking the raters to apply it to a slightly longer, five-minute extract divided into meaning units - segments of text with one main idea as understood by other participants in the context of the meeting (cf Bales 1950; Levitt et al. 2008). The extract consisted of 2.5 minutes of interaction either side of a central mid-point clash or strong challenge in UK Group 2 during their mapping task.

I provided the rater group with the matrix and instructions, stressing that the task was to focus on 'the space between' participants in the discussion. The matrix terminology was explained, with the y (vertical) axis representing low to high engagement levels (which could relate to some / all of the number of voices in the conversation; the level of interest, amusement, excitement; or the speed of interaction), and the x (horizontal) axis representing mood, ranging from unpleasant to pleasant as understood from the sense of what the group felt like, the atmosphere or pervading tone. The rater team were invited to work from instinct, trusting their responses and not overthinking with strong emphasis on the fact that there was no right or wrong answer. Although listening to 'the space between' in this way sounds impossible, recent studies suggest that working with audio data only can actually increase empathy in the researcher (Chandler et al. 2015; Kraus 2017), and we also found that there was an enormous amount of information available to us in the audio files.

**Rater instructions**

1. Listen to the extract provided. Jot down thoughts re 'the space between'.
2. Listen through again with the transcript in front of you. Make notes re space between against each meaning unit.
3. Listen through again with matrix and transcript. Pause the recording at the end of each unit and mark each unit in the appropriate square on the matrix.



Over a number of weeks, a final rater team of three – me and two others - were involved in extensive testing and rater discussions in order to establish interrater reliability. Initially the rater group worked remotely, listening to recordings of the unitised text and scoring each meaning unit in turn before recording them on the matrix and returning them to me, as the researcher. But to address inconsistencies in approach across the rater team, we moved on to working together, listening in silence to each meaning unit in turn and scoring it separately before comparing scores at the end of each 5-minute extract. What we realised was that the quicker we worked, and the more we trusted our instincts and intuition, the easier and more aligned the process seemed to be. Occasionally there was a big difference in rater response to a meaning unit, which provoked insightful discussions at many levels. The full range of rater scores for each 5-minute transcript is available to view interactively on the website ([www.stuijfzand-data.com/space-between-visualisations](http://www.stuijfzand-data.com/space-between-visualisations)), including dropdown text boxes displaying the each meaning unit being scored on the previous energy line.

While the resulting instrument did allow myself and the data scientist to produce a series of graphs, our mutual reflection on this process was that we didn't achieve this completely. A number of anomalies that emerged during the process would require further attention and work if this approach was to be taken again (for more on this, see Chapter 7). However, because of the inevitable resource limitations of a PhD – time, funds and relying on busy volunteers – I had to take a pragmatic approach to interrater reliability and decided to move forwards to the next stage. Bobby (data scientist) and I were confident that the process was adequate to produce valid enough data to continue and as a result, the numerical data generated for each meaning unit with the coding matrix was inputted onto datasheets and stored on CSV files.

Once onto datasheets, discussions were held around how to best convey the data collected and stored. The information was now in the form of three main variables: levels of mood and engagement as they shifted over a set period of time (5 minutes). At a technical level, this involved deciding on the 'class' or measurement level and quality of each of the variables. As time was plotted as a continuous variable, it was logical to include this on the x axis, even though the other two variables were also continuously measured. This type of

Stress: high engagement-unpleasant

eg

Interaction	Nonverbal	Mood
Domination	Stuttering	Distressed
Dismissive	Rapid speech	Anxious
Ignoring	Short of breath	Annoyed
Disruption	Uneven pitch, Voice cracks	nervous
Challenge	Uneven volume Laughing Hitting table	

Excitement: high engagement-pleasant

eg

Interaction	Nonverbal	Mood
Challenge	Laughter	Euphoric
Storytelling	High pitch	Lively
Exchange	Slightly breathless	Enthusiastic
Questions	Talking a lot	Excited
Suggestions	Animated	Peppy
Debating	Rhythmic Writing	

Engagement level

High engagement

Low engagement

8									
7									
6									
5									
4									
3									
2									
1									
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	

Unpleasant

Pleasant

Mood

Depression: low engagement-unpleasant

eg

Interaction	Nonverbal	Mood
Reluctance	Monotone	Tired
Disagreement	Few contributions	Dull
Assertive	Mumbling	Sluggish
Dominance	Low volume and pitch Delayed responses	Drowsy
Ignoring	Sighs Talking over	Bored Droopy

Relaxation: low engagement-pleasant

eg

Interaction	Nonverbal	Mood
Explaining	Soft but audible	Calm
Exchange	Some variability in tone / pitch	Relaxed
Responding	Regular pace	At rest
Questions		Serene
Suggestions		Content
Coaching	Drawing/writing	
Building		

Adapted from 'Ratings on Group Mood' by Russell et al. 1989; Bartel & Saavedra 2000; and Lehmann-Willenbrock et al. 2011

FIGURE 4 INSTRUMENT USED TO MEASURE 'THE SPACE BETWEEN'

data suggested the use of some particular types of visualization over others, the most obvious of which were line and scatter charts, both of which plot two dimensions against each other. In this case, however, we were working with three dimensions which led to the trial of various iterations in design and layout (*Figure 5*) with different variables on the y axis and the use of varying bubble size to indicate mood. On the final design (*Figure 5*) time was plotted along the x axis and engagement levels on the y axis (low to high) with variations in mood (unpleasant to pleasant) shown as a colour spectrum from red to green.

Two software programmes were used to generate the images, the first being 'R', a standard computer language for basic visualization programmes. The change of programmes as the visuals developed related to an early aspiration to link audio files to the energy lines that could be accessed via an interactive website, although in the event this was beyond the scope of this PhD. As 'R' was not capable of that level of interactivity, Bobby moved to D3, a powerful and well-regarded software library used extensively to build websites as well as to convey big data visualizations by media outfits such as the Guardian and the New York Times. As this programme was new to Bobby, working with D3 meant that it took a considerably longer time to generate an image than working in 'R' but resulted in an output that was far more sophisticated and capable of further expansion and development. The time required to create the images presented in the following chapters was huge and was mostly contributed in a voluntary capacity but resulted in a position where we have been able to attract two rounds of further funding to develop these initial ideas into a commercially viable product to assist with communication in teams and organisations. In the final chapter of the thesis, I analyse the challenges and successes of this attempt to visualize qualitative data in more detail.

## Designing the visualizations

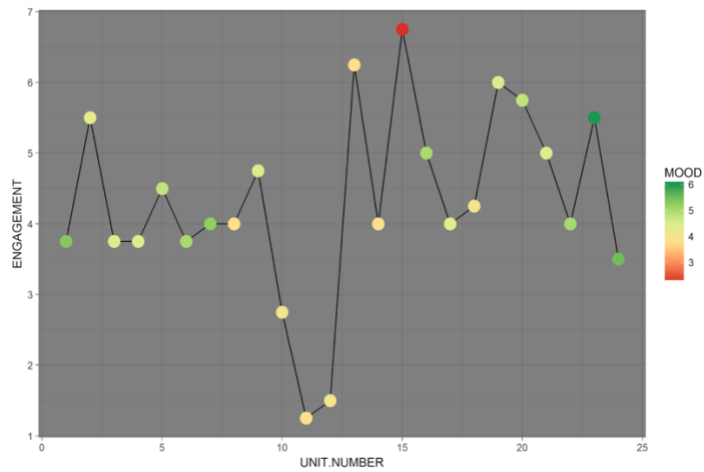
The initial visualization (*Design iteration 1, Figure 5*) showed engagement levels on the y axis and mood via a colour spectrum from green (positive) to red (negative), plotted along an x axis representing equally spaced meaning unit numbers. While there was plenty to discuss about this initial image, the pattern it threw up was striking in relation to conflict. Midway through the five-minute interaction it did indeed show an unmistakeable break in pattern, and one which to me as a conflict worker was of real interest and provided

completely new information. It showed that both engagement and mood (as represented by colour) plummeted just before there was an explosion in the group – a really interesting observation and one that was potentially useful. The image also mirrored interestingly the conflict escalation pattern known to those working with entrenched conflict, with repeated spikes of conflict escalation and de-escalation before the group resettled. However, in relation to its success as a way of conveying the data clearly, the image also begged many questions, ranging from the significance of what was represented on the x and y axis to the role and impact of aesthetics and design.

This led to numerous further design iterations. When mood was shown on the y-axis, for example, with engagement levels shown as larger and smaller coloured dots, a completely different image appears – and one without that impactful dip and rise in the energy line (*Figure 5*). In this example, I found the mood y-axis harder to follow for some reason, and the clear and interesting pattern in relation to conflict had disappeared. I realised that I had stumbled over my second real dilemma for the data visualization project: if the implications of such a small adjustment were so big, did this invalidate the entire project? At this point, I felt vertiginous, teetering on the edge of a very unwelcome conclusion. But with reflection and discussion with others, I was reminded that I was not engaging with this exploration to produce the ‘definitive’ answer to a question nor a perfected new method. I was taking an emergent approach to research in which anything could occur. I decided to continue, although I recognised the importance of noting this particularly interesting moment. This was also the point at which I contacted a graphic designer in order to explore in more detail various issues relating to visual data presentation that had been raised when I presented early-stage findings at conferences, from the use of colour to the impact of aesthetics.

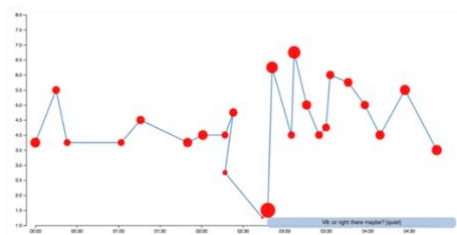
From the start of the visualization project, I had been keen to address the aesthetics of data presentation, following a hunch that the easier on the eye the presentation was, the longer individuals would stay with the visualization and therefore the more they would take from it. As a result I contacted Derek Edwards, a longtime graphic design associate who came on board to explore various aspects of qualitative data presentation with me. The subsequent design research drew on multiple sources (cf Tufte 1989, DiBiase et al. 1992, Pink & Mackley 2012, Chandler et al. 2015) and included visual explorations of accessibility, of colour impact, of multi-layered research and into the use of pattern, texture, animation and shape in

## Design iteration 1

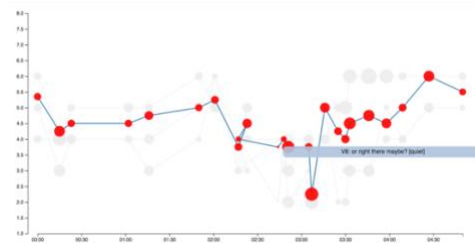


Visualisation generated  
with **R** (programming  
language) using **ggplot2**  
– standard visualization  
library for this language.

### Design iteration 2 – Exploring representation on the y axis (x axis = time)



Y axis – engagement



Y axis – mood

### Design iteration 3 – Exploring colours and aesthetics

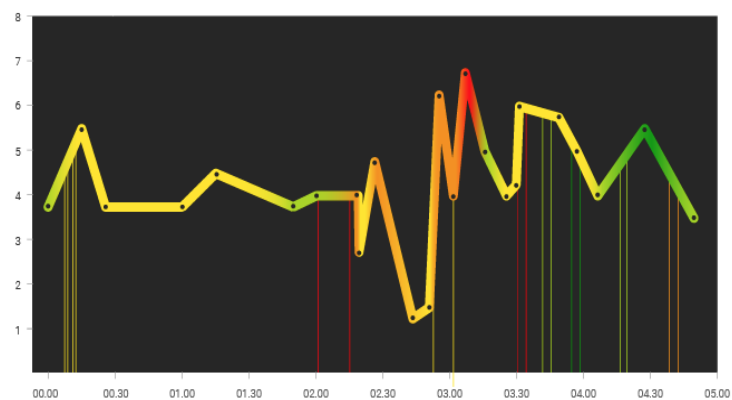


FIGURE 5 VARIOUS DESIGN ITERATIONS

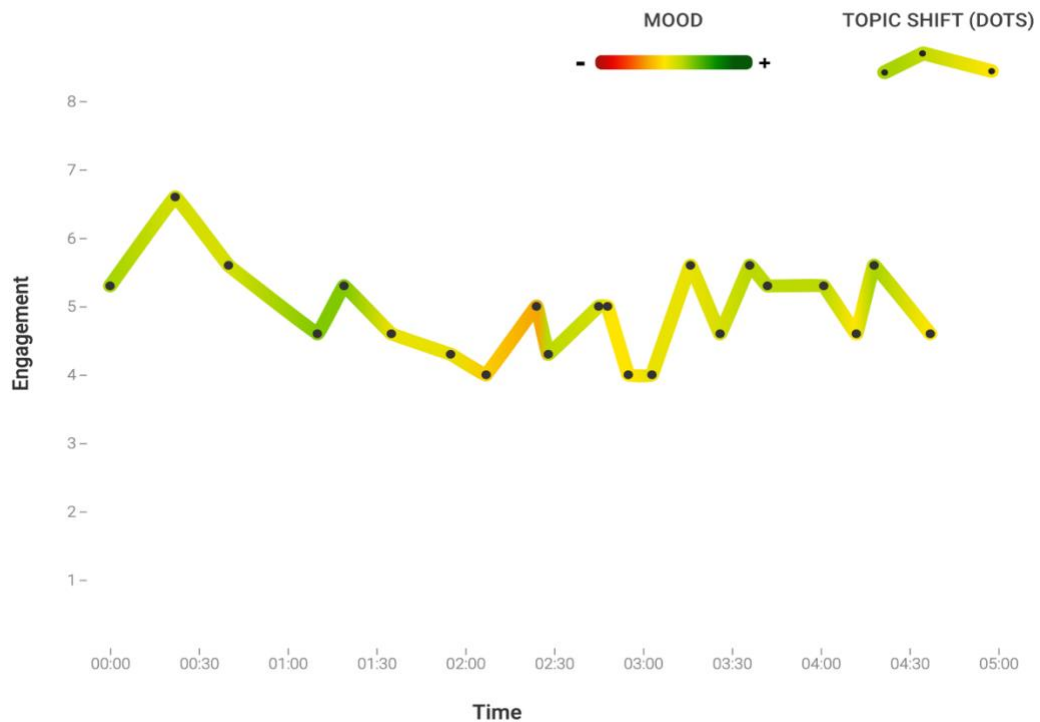


FIGURE 6 DESIGN ITERATION 4 - THE FINAL DESIGN

displaying qualitative data (see Appendix 5). Following this visual research, the design of the energy line graphs changed considerably. The decision was taken to plot time along the x axis with engagement levels on the y axis (low to high) and variations in mood (unpleasant to pleasant) shown as a colour spectrum from red to green along the energy line. Design Iteration 3 (*Figure 4*) was our favourite design by far but was not used in this study because of concerns about its stylized prominence of design over information, as well as its print difficulties. As a result, we opted for Figure 5, a more classic portrayal of a graph which was still clean, interesting and aesthetically pleasing. It was also suitable for additional 'layers' of nonverbal analysis and for reproduction in black and white.

Once this design was selected, a five minute 'group energy line' visualization was developed for each of the four groups as set out in Chapter 5. As the four lines each showed a distinct pattern of interaction, I was confident that there was something emerging of real interest and value in terms of data analysis. I wondered if the graphs might provide a baseline to overlay with different further layers of visual analysis and textual reflection to build up a rich

and unusual understanding of the dynamics of each group. To illustrate how this might work, I decided to push the visualization project one step further with the addition of a second visual across the same stretch of talk – the use of laughter.

### Adding laughter points

Although laughter has been relatively little explored in the literature, studies of laughter as a particular phenomenon show that it is a behaviour that can correspond to several internal states and is interesting because of its frequent occurrence in group interaction. Most

existing studies investigating the use and classification of laughter have used audio cues only as in this piece of research (cf Holmes & Marra 2002; Gronnerod 2004; Sen 2012). I chose to study laughter over other possible nonverbal indicators of group dynamic – silence, sighs, interruptions and so on – because of frequent rater discussions on the use and function of laughter while scoring the transcripts to create the baseline visualizations:

- |         |  |
|---------|--|
| Rater 1 | <i>Everyone is laughing and then there is suddenly a point when there is silence</i>   |
| Rater 2 | <i>It was also about the way, it started out as true laughter but then suddenly there was something wrong about it</i>   |
| Rater 3 | <i>I felt the same. And we had a discussion about that in the last set of marking we did too. Is this real laughter, or is this fake laughter? And it made me think hard. Let's listen to it again</i> |

Audio clip played again

- |         |   |
|---------|---|
| Rater 2 | <i>Is that social laughter?</i>   |
| Rater 1 | <i>Yeah, yeah</i>   |
| Rater 3 | <i>I think it's social, not real laughter. I think it's fascinating, it all serves a purpose, but I don't find any of it true. But then perhaps I'm not listening with the right ears</i> |
| Rater 2 | <i>So what score did you give it?</i>   |

The hope was that by better understanding when and how laughter was used across the fields of tension that had already been selected, this would provide additional qualitative source data to enrich the baseline group energy line visualizations. I was interested to see what - if any - correlation emerged between the use of laughter and the energy shifts in each

of field of tension. I thought this analysis direction could also have applied potential for collaborative working, as previous studies suggest that laughter can be reasonably reliably annotated and used for subsequent training and evaluation of groups. This idea of 'listening with the right ears' suggests how we as a rater group were reacting to the audio through our particular worldviews and experiences – our cultural frames. What 'the wrong ears' would look like is not clear but these are the kind of insights which could be useful to ask groups to reflect on.

To create the laughter lines presented in this chapter, I listened repeatedly to the four extracts and then grouped and noted down the different types or uses of laughter I could

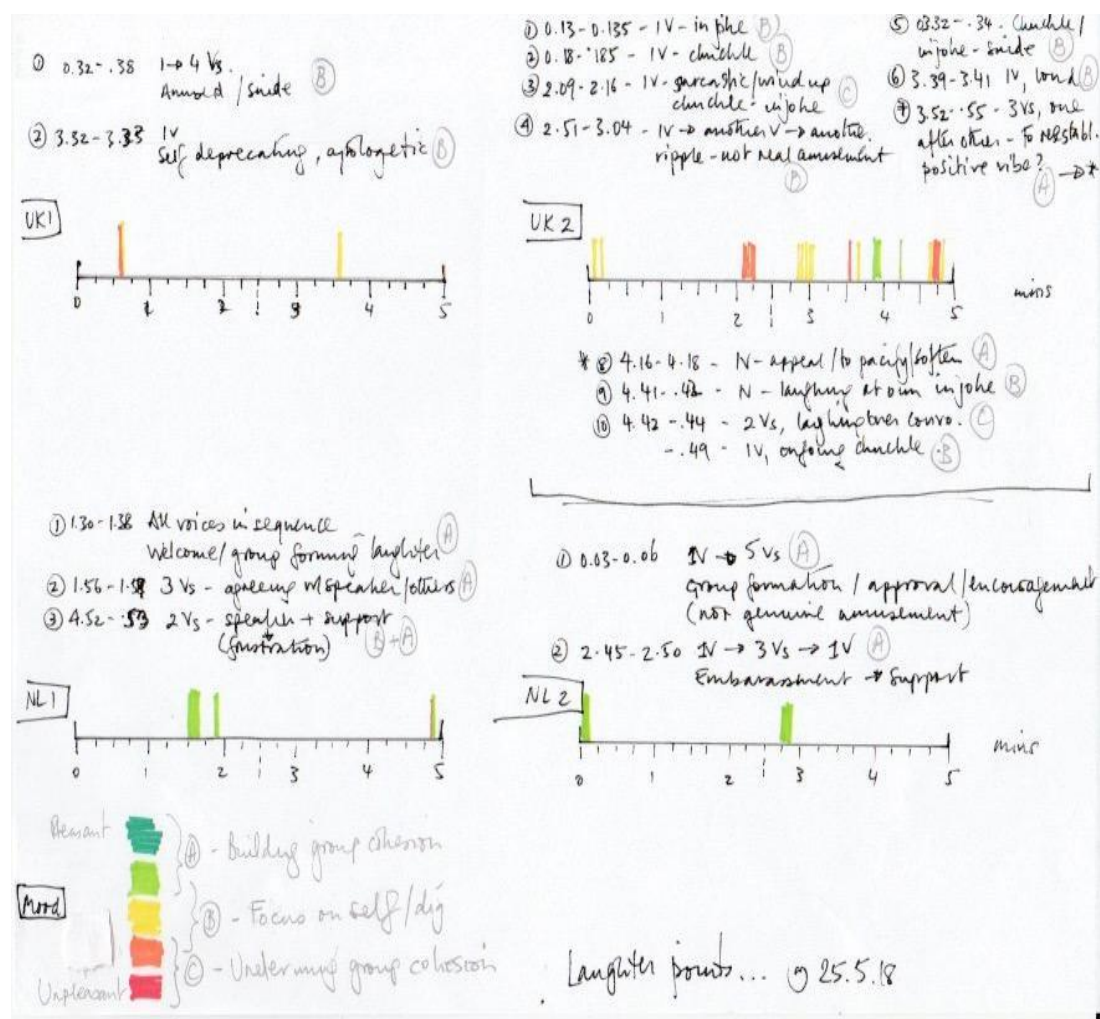


FIGURE 7 WORK IN PROGRESS - DEVELOPING A CATEGORISATION OF LAUGHTER



identify. These fell into three broad and fuzzy-edged groupings of function that I then ordered along an overlapping spectrum of mood that echoed the energy lines (*Figure 7*). To my ears, cohesive laughter was used to build group cohesion, laughing with someone else as support, for example. This category encompassed the idea of social laughter as highlighted in the extract on the previous page and was generally used to make others more comfortable and to release group tension. Self-focused laughter, on the other hand, seemed to be used to draw attention either to or away from the self, sometimes to deflect attention or to cover embarrassment. This category also included ‘in-jokes’ used to establish in-group and out-group dynamics as well as laughter expressing personal anger and nervous laughter, possibly venting uncomfortable but unexpressed feelings within a group. Divisive laughter was distinctly less generous, often used in the sense of ‘just a joke’ but which undermined group cohesion and created distance. This laughter at or over others often served to agitate the group and to underscore power relations. As noted in the chapters that follow, this last category of laughter was used mainly by the UK groups and rarely heard in the Dutch groups.

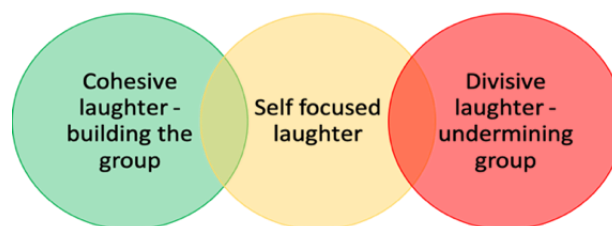


FIGURE 8 OVERLAPPING FUNCTIONS OF LAUGHTER

Once all the incidents of laughter across the fields of tension had been categorised, they were added to the 5-minute energy lines as sequential overlays. Considerable attention was paid to how the two nonverbal visuals – energy and laughter - could be presented to produce maximum impact, value and clarity. In the final design for laughter lines (*Figure 9*), the purpose of each laughter event is shown through a colour bar at the bottom of the line and its duration is indicated by the width of shadowed area.

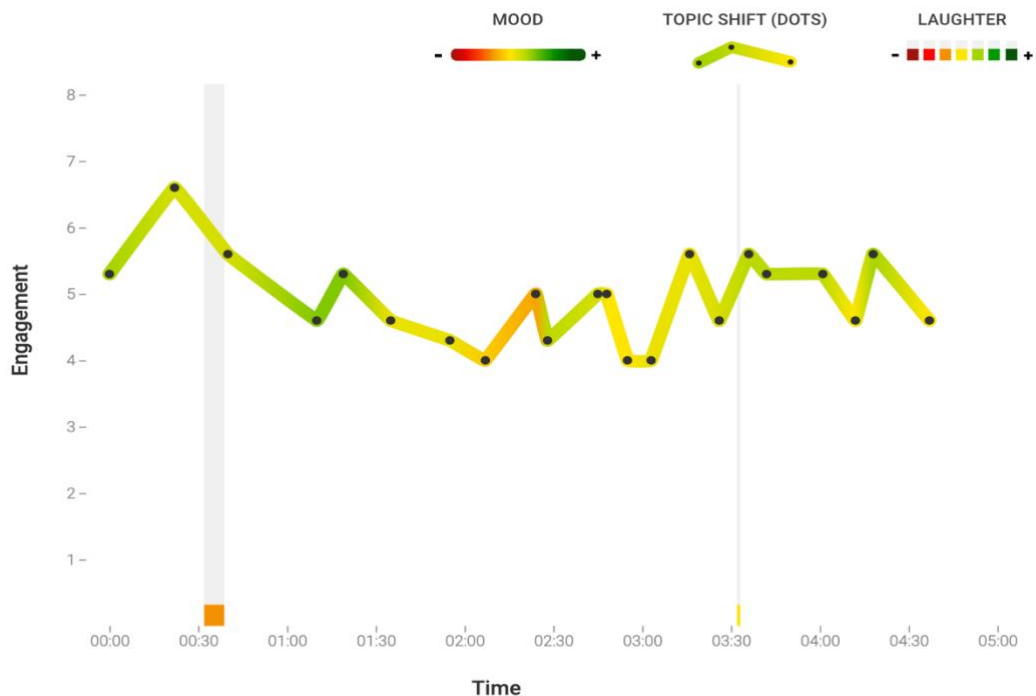


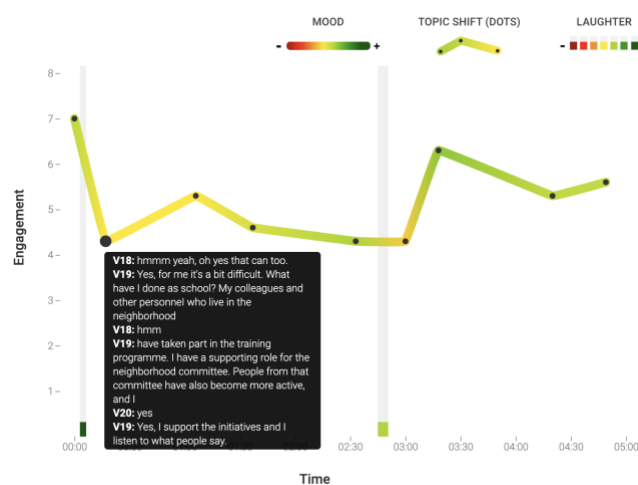
FIGURE 9 DESIGN ITERATION 5 - THE ADDITION OF LAUGHTER POINTS

## Interactive data presentation

The final development in the visualization project was to upload the various layers of data collected onto an interactive website. One of the original ambitions for the study was to make its findings as accessible as possible, so anyone could engage with the material whether from an academic background or not. The aim of integrating text extracts with the baseline visualizations was to allow readers an opportunity to reach their own conclusions about the interaction of group participants (Pink & Mackley 2012) as well as providing additional insight into the interpretive analytic process used by the researchers (Chandler et al. 2015). To my mind, this enhances the study's credibility by challenging my own interpretations of the data. A second aim for the interactivity - the inclusion of audio clips of laughter - was abandoned for reasons of confidentiality. Even so, the interactive website does provide additional information to the data presented in this printed thesis and does fulfil the initial aim of adding transparency to the analysis process. All the final visualizations

for the four groups are available online at [www.stuijfzand-data.com/space-between-visualisations](http://www.stuijfzand-data.com/space-between-visualisations), including an interactive facility which shows dropdown text boxes for each meaning unit of the discussions when you click on the black dots along the energy lines (Figure 10) as well as the interactive presentation of the individual rater scores. Each rater line is highlighted when you click on them individually.

*Dropdown text boxes showing individual meaning units*



*Rater scores for each individual meaning unit*

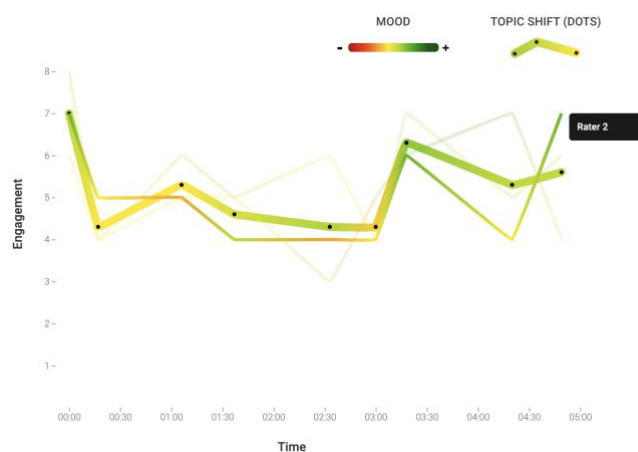


FIGURE 10 INTERACTIVE DATA PRESENTATION

## Strengths and limitations of the visualization approach

Group conversational data is recognised as being hard to record and process, not least because there are few tried and tested research resources, annotation is expensive and small quantities of data cannot provide strong conclusions or statistical significance. The pitfalls in relation to studying nonverbal interactions in small groups have also been well documented in the literature and include recording clarity and the variability of recorded speech (Cowie & Cornelius 2003). This has relevance for this study, as participants were involved in interactive work together as they talked and therefore did speak over each other at times. Just as the rating process showed here, others have found that judgements during inter-rater reliability tests are culturally informed and influenced by the native language of the speaker (Wrede & Schriberg 2003). This suggests that specific nonverbal behaviours cannot be mapped onto specific meanings with any certainty as social constructs can be perceived differently depending on specific conversational situations (Hall et al. 2005:898, in Garcia-Perez 2009).

Despite these challenges, however, those involved in developing the visualizations were impressed by its potential as a way to incorporate paralinguistic (nonverbal) data in the analysis process. The methodology also addressed other well-documented challenges in the analysis of qualitative data, providing an approach for analysing both spoken and non-spoken data in a single framework as well as a tool for identifying patterns in the data that picked up on subtle cultural and cross-cultural differences. It also encourages qualitative researchers – and especially in those engaging in participant observation research - to focus on the group dynamic rather than individual behaviour/s alone, and foregrounds research/er transparency. Both the final visualizations and the interactive website allows readers to see how the raw data was manipulated to reaching the findings that are presented here.

In Chapter 7, in the review of the strengths and weaknesses of the research design overall, I explore other issues that arose around the visualization project, including the consistency of applying meaning units to the selected texts. The trial-and-error nature of exploratory research such as this has to be acknowledged, and there are a number of issues that would need to be ironed out if it was going to be applicable in other research and applied settings, including those of confidentiality and functionality. Were I to start again, there are many

aspects to this project that I would do differently. More attention would be paid to standardized data collection strategies upfront, such as better matching the recording volumes in the data sessions and the collection of additional video footage as triangulation. I would also have altered and improved the consent form signed by participants in order to have allowed online use of audio clips of laughter if everyone had agreed.

Nonetheless, I am confident that there are strengths to this nascent visualization approach and I am mindful of the fact that others seem to feel the same way, dedicating time, energy and funds to enable us to develop our initial thinking further. It can be seen as an attempt to grapple with an interesting and understudied area of work, with multiple future tasks for researchers to take forward. It might be complicated to measure 'the space between' but just because we cannot yet measure shifts of energy doesn't mean that the attempt was not worthwhile. I also feel it validates the open and emergent approach I took to the analysis process, fully committing to my insights and intuition in relation to the possibilities inherent in visualizing the data. The visualization project has been exciting and rewarding, personally, collaboratively and in relation to the PhD outputs. From my perspective, new and different understandings of the data did emerge as a result which have in turn generated theoretical and applied possibilities for the research findings as set out in the next two chapters.

## Conclusion

In this chapter, I have outlined the various types of data collected and the approach taken to integrating those different datasets. In the following two chapters I apply these approaches to the data, overlaying the visualization of nonverbal elements in the groups' interactions with thicker layers of qualitative textual analysis. In Chapter 7, I return to these two methodology chapters to assess the strengths and weaknesses of the overall research design.

## Chapter 5:

### Findings 1 - Visualizing ‘the space between’

In this chapter I look at the visualizations of two nonverbal elements present in the interaction of each group – group energy levels and the use of laughter – and explore how these related to dynamics of collaboration and conflict as participants worked together. These particular elements were selected as both were palpable in the room, were measurable and had distinct impacts on the nature of the space between the participants in each of the four data collection groups.

As previously described, my attention was held while transcribing the data by the nonverbal content in the interactions as they worked on the mapping task. I became fascinated by how the energy in the space was shifting and wondered whether it might be possible to visualize that sense of intangible energy and connection. I developed this idea with the University of Bristol’s Jean Golding Institute as the research progressed, and the early-stage results from that collaboration are the group energy lines set out in the sections below. The visualizations shown here combine both verbal and nonverbal content of the group discussion over a 5-minute ‘field of tension’ centred around a point of conflict or interruption to the group flow. Sequential overlays of occurrences of laughter are then added across the same time period to deepen an understanding of how the space between participants might be affected by its use and also to explore how this new visualization approach to qualitative data could be further developed.

#### Generating the data

The first main task in the interactive data collection sessions was to work together to co-create a map of the collaborative system around a specific piece of delivery work. All four groups were given identical instructions, materials to work with and time allowance. They were then free to approach the task in any way they chose, the instructions left deliberately loose and open to allow participants to pick up on what interested them. In Round 1, groups in both the UK and the Netherlands were looking at a specific delivery programme that they had completed within two years prior to 2016. The collaborative maps they created then

provided a route to Round 2 participants who subsequently completed the same task. Within the overall research design, this system mapping task had multiple aims:

- to engage the group in a shared activity;
- to minimize researcher impact on the group discussion by using written instructions;
- to generate and observe group interaction;
- to enable participants to access deeper levels of thinking as they co-created and interacted with a visual image;
- to provide leads to Round 2 participants;
- to see how individuals and groups working at different levels of a collaborative system approached an identical task.

In the sections below I explore collaboration and conflict dynamics within each data collection group by looking at three levels of visualization: the groups' co-created maps, the energy lines and the additional laughter points. Each section starts with some background and context for the group incorporating unedited quotes from participants as well as observation, reflection and rater group data relating the group's process. I explain how I selected a 5-minute extract to visualize for each group energy line and the implications that emerge when the laughter points were added to the lines. Each section closes with a brief summary of learning in relation to collaboration and conflict in the group interaction that I might not otherwise have noticed. In the final sections of the chapter I reflect on patterns of interaction that emerged across the four groups and how these relate to the subsequent findings chapters.

For the best understanding of this chapter and the findings that follow, it would be useful to have the unitized transcripts for the four extracts to hand (see Appendix 6, Unitized transcripts). A number of abbreviations are used in the presentation of the findings, with names of individuals and organisations shortened by use of first two letters and a dash – for example, Re-. In addition, the following abbreviations are used in the presentation data extracts:

- P = participant
- P1 = participant number eg P1 or P7
- R = researcher
- C-O = co-observer
- RF = reflection facilitator.

## UK Group 1 – Round 1 of data collection in the UK

**The cross-sector collaboration** In 2012 Community Resolve ([www.communityresolve.com](http://www.communityresolve.com)) was asked to provide skills training for trainee community organisers across England. The Community Organiser initiative was a flagship central government programme then into its second of five years. As many locally recruited and inexperienced organisers were running into complicated relational dynamics in their new roles, Community Resolve was commissioned to provide them with support in understanding and engaging with conflict. Over a 3-year period, the organisation provided community organisers with face-to-face and online workshops, group webinars and individual 1-1 supervisions as well as accredited online training at NVQ (via Apt) and Masters level (via the University of West of England). Over that time, Community Resolve worked with 800+ individual community organisers in local communities across the country, liaising with local community hubs, other training providers and national programme managers and commissioners.

The participants in UK Group 1 had worked as part of Community Resolve to deliver the programme above. The group consisted of 5 individuals (4 females aged 48-64 and 1 male aged 32), all British-born except for the male participant (Italian) and in a variety of roles – manager, trainer, administrator and so on. The data collection session started with participants briefly sharing their motivations for taking part in the research. They spoke of their commitment to the empowering nature of the training the organisation delivered as well as enjoyment of the diverse trainees, connection and the *‘personal learning, you know, the kind of constant learning’* that they themselves took away from being part of the delivery team:

- P5      *‘the depth of the work that Community Resolve did’*
- P1      *‘being interested in the impact of the kind of work we do’*
- P2      *‘I like the kind of people Community Resolve turns up, because the whole point of this is this mixture of diverse people with different ideas’*
- P3      *‘I always was a technician, but I benefitted from [the work] as I could see the positive impact on people, something I miss a lot in the jobs I have now.’*



### Task 1: Data collection session

Task: Work together to create a picture or map of the collaboration. On your map, include any of the following information in some way:

- Who is involved? At any level? This can include service users, partner agencies, community allies, other allies, funders, evaluators, academics, local officials/bodies, politicians, associates, trainers, anyone else you think of.
- Who is connected to who? Indicate how strong / weak that relationship is. Does the connection go both ways?
- Who are the significant connectors in the network? Names and roles.

### Co-creating a map of the collaborative system

The group then moved on to jointly creating a 'map' of the working partnerships needed to deliver their contribution to the training programme. As the coherence of their map suggests (*Figure 11*), they worked together efficiently, covering all the questions asked of them and creating an understandable image of a large and complex collaborative system. They added a key to help disentangle the threads (right hand side of map) and listed the 'players' involved (top right hand corner) wryly noting as they did so that they had started with the government at the top - '*the money*' - and finished with community members at the bottom, despite it being a programme for communities. They then added indications of how communication had operated across the collaborative system (in red and turquoise) and discussed extensively how they found themselves working on poor communication and connection across different levels of the system – between community organisers and local communities, their host hubs and programme managers, as well as between the national programme managers and the lead training body. The group's representation of themselves as key communicators within a relatively dysfunctional system was noted immediately after the meeting in discussions between the observer team (made up of researcher and co-observer). Pleased with the outcome, the group expressed how completing the task gave



them a sense of how they had contributed to a bigger network of delivery for the first time. A month later, I returned to P1 and P2 to ask about their reflections on the session and their map:

*P1 We had to work hard at creating communication channels and those efforts actually benefitted the whole organisation [ie collaborative system] and the people in it, despite what we were getting out of it. So I'm prepared to say that we did definitely improve those communications.*

### Selecting a field of tension to visualize

From the hour-long recording of the group discussion during this task, I then selected 5 minutes to unpick in detail in order to better understand how 'the spaces between' individuals and roles were negotiated. As there was no clear moment of disagreement in the group, I centred the 5-minute extract on what felt like a low point in the interaction, where communication ground to a halt. This highlighted an interesting paradox: the group's map had focussed on how they had improved communications across a system and yet the moment I chose to unpick centred on a reluctance to speak out around the issue of communications and power relations across the collaboration. Our observations collected directly after the session drew attention to a further contradiction, noting the space between what was said in the room (ie the verbal content of the interaction) and what was going on at the time:

*R You pointed out tensions?*

*C-O There was tension, but it was not disturbing from my point of view. Some power plays – for example when P2 said 'I'm not going out of the room' when they were dividing into groups. She was just saying 'I'm staying here, I don't care what you're doing but I'm staying here', in a pleasant way but there was some rudeness there.*

*R You were seeing some very interesting dynamics in that group that I would not have seen at all. I would not have lingered on those moments. And there was tension but it was not destroying the space, it was managed, people moved on...*

*C-O Still there was tension ...*

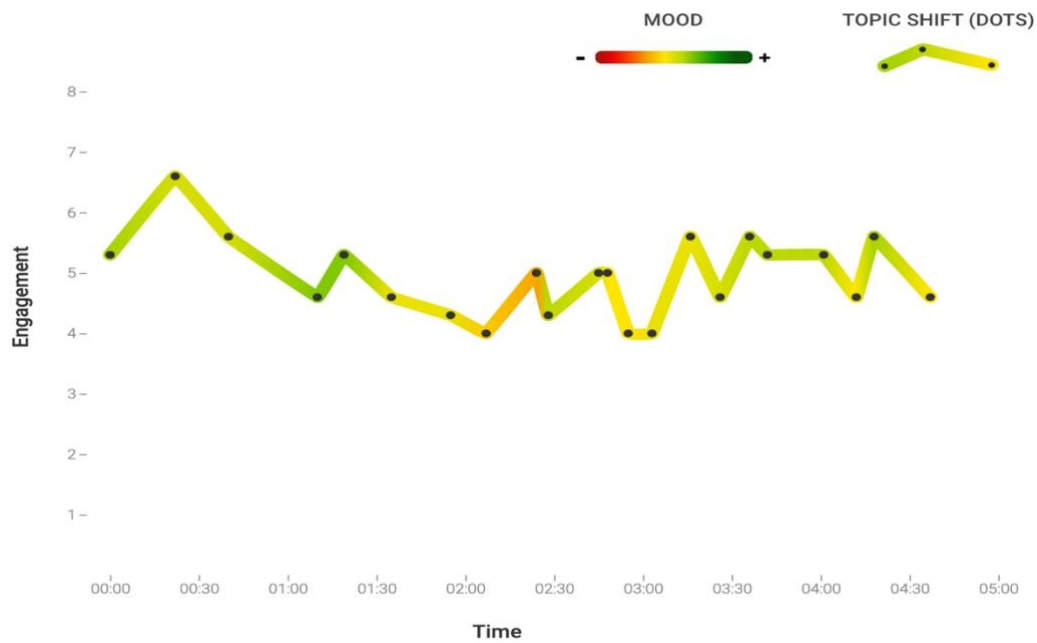
As an aside, this joint reflection highlights the added value brought to the research by working with a co-observer. As a researcher with a close relationship to this organisation (although not this particular piece of work), I knew all the characters in the room. While I could recognise certain familiar behaviours in how this group were interacting, other aspects of their interaction I was completely blind to and struggled to acknowledge.

Following the methodology set out in Chapter 4, the qualitative data from this 5-minute field of tension was converted into an energy line. As with all four groups, the selected extract was strictly curtailed to 5 minutes and measured equidistant from a central identified point of conflict. As a result, the patterns that emerged in this and the other lines were completely unpredictable and could not have been artificially created by me, as the researcher.

At the start of the extract the group is engaged and positive but following an interaction at Unit 2 (Line 7) the mood and engagement both start to fall. As can be seen from the transcript, the slide down from a high point at 0.22 minutes is primarily an interaction between P1 and P2, the longest standing associates in the group. A heavy sigh at 2.24 minutes gives a clue to the deteriorating mood in the room, but it would be hard to convey the tone or nature of that sigh working with transcription alone. What emerges as a result of the visualization are the distinctly different characteristics of the energy line before and after the central point of conflict (*Figure 12*). Between the start of the extract and the sigh at Unit 9 (Line 41 - deep orange) the line shows a slow, consistent slide downwards in both engagement and mood. Two of the five voices withdraw from the discussion completely before the group engagement level reaches its lowest level at 2.20 (Unit 8). There is a moment of silence followed by the sigh, a heaviness that suggests something unspoken in the room is being unveiled - or has the potential to be unveiled. Immediately after that, and over the subsequent interactions to the end of the extract, there is a noticeable re-engagement by others in the group, a sense of more work and input as if to raise the mood and re-establish group stability. Voices previously unheard in the extract join in (see Units 10-12, 2.28-2.48 minutes) and by the end of the extract the group are close to a similar level of engagement and mood as at the start of the field of tension. This suggests a corrective shift in order to break an underlying tension in the group and to bolster the group mood.

## UK Group 1 energy line

On the graph below, each black dot represents a new meaning unit (or 'topic shift' in the key), signifying a change in direction in the verbal content of the interaction. These are shown across a five-minute time period (x axis) with levels of group engagement (low to high) on the y axis. Group mood is indicated by the colour of the line on a spectrum from green (pleasant) to red (unpleasant).



## Before and after the midway conflict point

Before

After

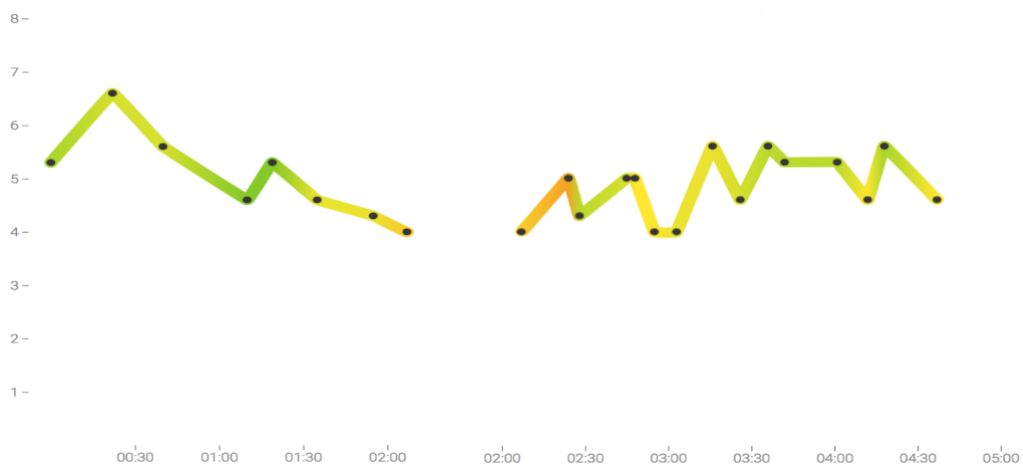


FIGURE 12 UK GROUP 1 ENERGY LINES

### Adding laughter to the energy line

I felt a closer study of laughter might hold potential for practical application, for example as a tool to help a group pay specific attention to how it used laughter and what it represented in that specific context. As a result, I decided to explore more deeply the correlation between the use of laughter and shifts in group energy across the five-minute field of tension in each group. It also provided an opportunity to test the energy line idea by seeing whether the addition of a second nonverbal element brought additional information about the group to light. Table 3 shows when laughter occurred across UK Group 1's field of tension according to my assessment of its function and the allocation of a colour category – cohesive (green), self-focused (yellow) or divisive (red).

As soon as laughter points were added to the group energy line it became clear that there was indeed a correlation between the two (*Figure 13*). In this example, the 'joke' made by P2 at 0.22 (Line 7, Unit 2) is followed by laughter across several seconds drawing in four different voices (between 0.32 and 0.38). When this audio clip is listened to repeatedly, however, it is evident how complex and coercive laughter can be, ranging here through snide amusement to expressing offence before petering out. The impact of the marginally divisive laughter shows immediately as the group energy line begins to fall at 0.22 seconds, continuing (with a brief reprieve at 1.10 seconds, Unit 4) to a group low point at Unit 8, 2.07 seconds.

The second incident of laughter across the five minutes is also telling. At 3.32, P5 is attempting to get the group to create a key for the map they are creating, the second time of asking. To soften this repeated request and also to establish a presence in this group, she seems to use laughter to diffuse any tension caused by the suggestion. At this point, the energy line suggests that the group is working hard to re-establish group harmony which may or may relate to the apologetic nature of the laughter, as if in an attempt to not rock the boat again.

TABLE 3 INCIDENTS OF LAUGHTER, UK GROUP 1

Timing	Participants	Description	Category
0.32-0.38	1 – 4 voices	Sarcastic amusement, slightly snide	Self focused /divisive
3.32-3.33	1 voice	Self deprecating, apologetic	Self focussed

### UK Group 1 energy line with laughter points

On the graph below, and in subsequent groups, laughter lines are shown by the shaded areas cutting across the energy line. The width of the shaded area relates to the duration of laughter while the colour block sitting on the x axis indicates the laughter's function, from cohesive (green) through self-focussed (yellow) to divisive (red).

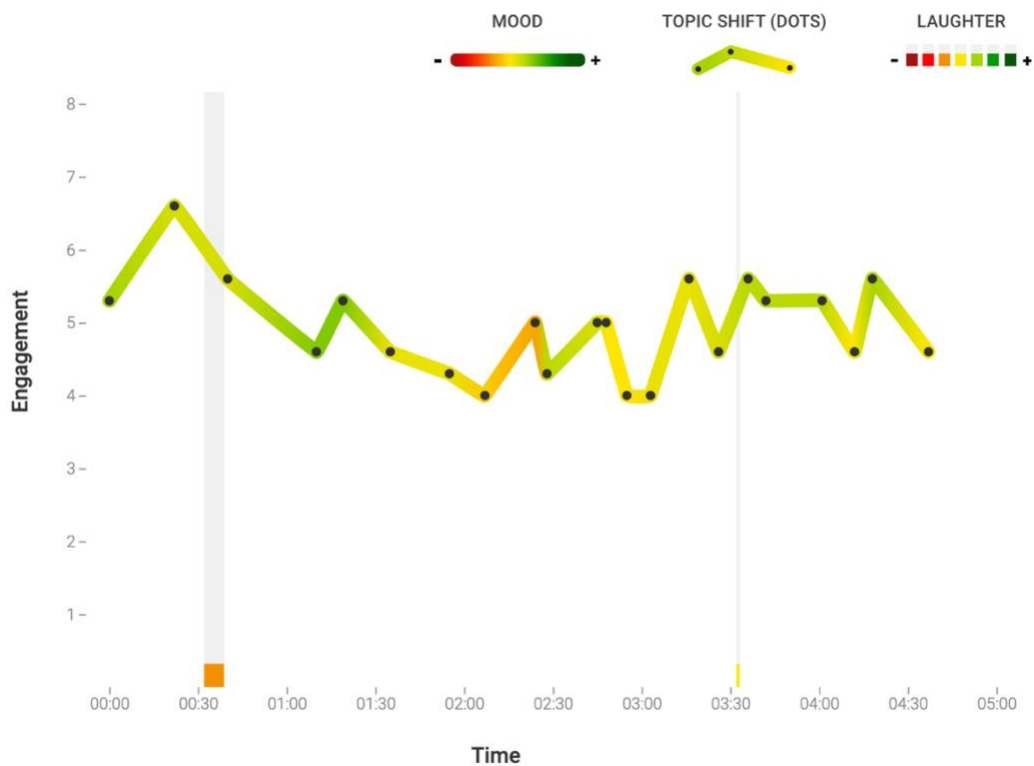


FIGURE 13 UK GROUP 1 ENERGY LINE PLUS LAUGHTER

## Summary

Visualizing the energy line definitely brought fresh and unexpected understandings of the data especially in relation to patterns of group energy across the selected field of tension. It deepened the sense of the group dynamic with evidence of a shift in energy before and after the central point of tension. The group was noticeably busier in the second half of the extract than in the first both in terms of group contribution and in terms of changeability of mood and engagement. Adding the laughter points to the energy line contributed a further layer of understanding of the group interaction, suggesting a link between the use of laughter and group mood.

In relation to collaboration and conflict, a further clear conclusion from the data of this group is that the use of psychodynamic observation techniques before, during and after data collection sessions generated accurate, unexpected and additional information about the participant interactions. In this group, for example, there was the tension between the group having a stated sense of being 'the communicators' within a wider collaboration with multiple examples of poor communication channels – and yet the central conflict point in the field of tension was where communication dried up within the group itself as it completed its shared task. Reflecting on this paradox led to the idea of unveiling difficult topics within groups and how to engage with unspoken difficulties in groups, drawing attention to when or how groups decide to engage with conflict - or not. If they do not, why is that?

Despite embarking on the analysis process without any specific expectation in terms of what the data would show, a number of key points emerged during my engagement with visual and nonverbal data from this group's interaction. I had a clear sense of how an interactive data collection approach had successfully accessed beneath-the-surface group dynamics which would not have been available through traditional focus group interview techniques or thematic textual analysis. I could also see how combining psychodynamic observation approaches with data visualization had enabled me to understand something of how participants dealt with conflict and collaboration in the room. And yet again, my attention was drawn to the importance of challenging researcher bias and standpoint through working with others of diverse nationalities, first languages, ages and genders.



## UK Group 2 - Round 2 of data collection in the UK

The group of participants assembled for Round 2 were selected because they appeared on the UK Group 1 map of the collaborative system. The list on the following page shows the wide range of collaborative partners that the delivery organisation needed to interact with to achieve their objectives, and which were therefore included on their map. The five participants in Round 2 were drawn from across the spread of these organisations and was made up of two community organisers (one of which also trained other organisers), the national and training programme managers and a senior civil servant overseeing the programme. Four were British-born women aged 35-59 and one was an African-American male aged 36. Participants in this group had a number of complex prior relationships with each other, both as individuals and between the organisations and roles they represented. By the time of the research, most of those in the group had moved on from working on this programme and were involved in different organisations and activities.

As with all four groups, the data collection session started with an opportunity for each participant to talk about their reasons for agreeing to take part in the research. Although it took a while to get going, this group spoke of getting involved because of a desire to continue their connection with the delivery organisation (Community Resolve) in some way. One wanted to *'talk more and develop a deeper conversation'*, another of being interested in the work *'from a philosophical perspective, but also in terms of the way that they facilitated'* and another of the respect and the connections made with Community Resolve workers: *'I feel I'm being seen and understood and I want to, I actively want to be connected and still do stuff'*. A broader desire to maintain a network of people who connect well and share values was expressed, seen as particularly important in a challenging UK work environment which was constantly changing and often involved shifting teamwork on timebound projects.

### Co-creating a map of the collaborative system

When it came to co-creating a map of the system surrounding Community Resolve's delivery the group seemed challenged, even though many of them had worked together over a period of several years. What struck the observer team was that as with the opening round of discussion, it seemed really hard for the group to get started. There was some noticeably

#### Entities in UK system as identified by UK Group 1

- Community members, volunteers and organisers
- Host organisations
- Several training organisations, including Community Resolve
- Apt Ed – awarding body for CR accredited NVQ training
- UWE – awarding body for CR accredited Masters training
- Regenerate – initial training leads for Community Organisers
- Locality – programme award leaders
- Cabinet Office – senior civil servants monitoring programme progress / finances
- Senior government minister, Office for Civil Society – nominal head of programme

unrelaxed body language and behaviour – arm folding, reluctance to engage and so on – and the final image they created gives little sense of coordination or of being an integrated collaborative system. The map is dominated by the names of individuals and it is hard to find a reference to Community Resolve, the delivery organisation at the heart of this inquiry. When it is found (righthand side of the map) it is abbreviated and attached to a single, shortened name: ‘B-, CR associate’. Why the participants used their own and other people’s names rather than including their roles and organisations puzzled the observer team:

*C-O It was a strange decision by them all to focus entirely on themselves and not to engage at all with the systems and structures that they worked inside. They became very hooked up on mapping themselves while everybody tried to position themselves as not having anything to do with it.*

*R It was as if they couldn’t understand the story without themselves somehow in the forefront of it. Really interesting in how they turned it all into individuals rather than organisations... and in a way, that’s really relevant to what I’m looking at in the PhD because I’m thinking about how individual characteristics play out in collaborative structures.*

Various competition and power issues surfaced during this data collection session although in a noticeably indirect fashion – a bit like the map itself:

*RF It’s a big blob of things, and then with circles around, lines around. It’s all around, it’s not in between. Everything goes via other ways, it’s not... so there’s hardly anything direct, it looks like. It strikes me that if their relations weren’t good, that that is why they drew the map with their names personally. But once you see it as personal things it makes all the more difficult, I think.*

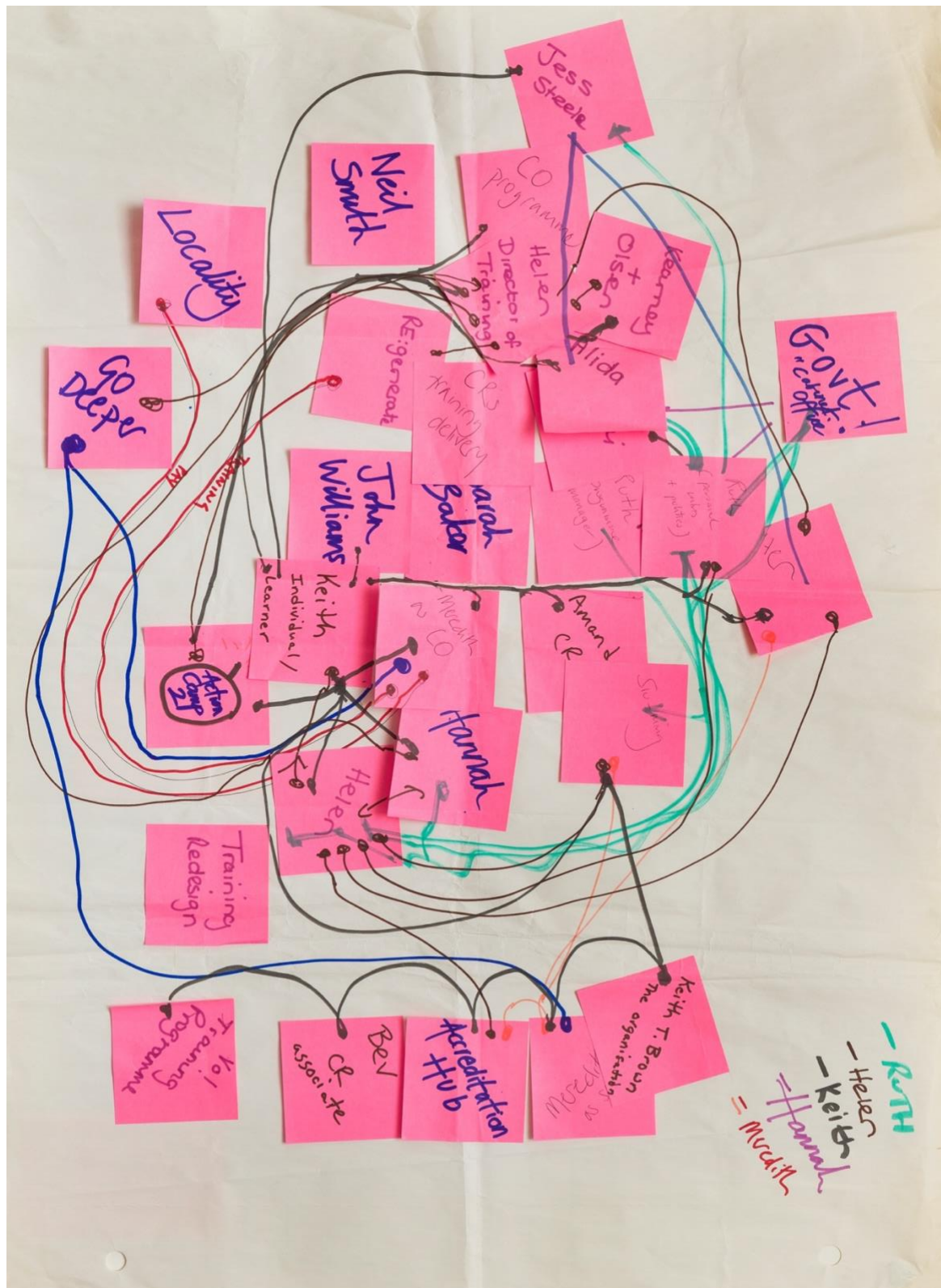


FIGURE 14 UK GROUP 2 MAP OF COLLABORATIVE SYSTEM

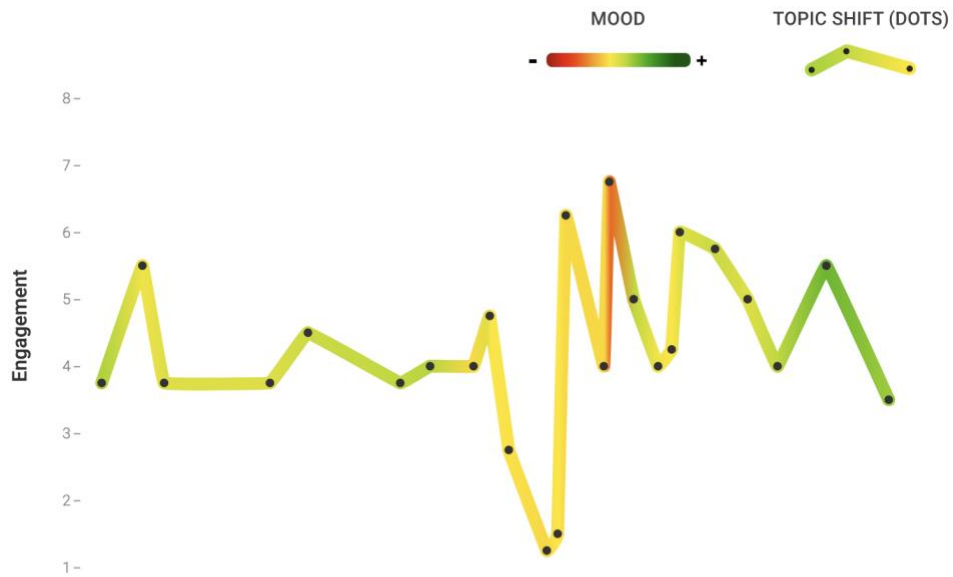
### Selecting a field of tension to visualize

With this group, there was no difficulty whatsoever in identifying a field of tension to explore in more detail. Although the group dynamic seemed to me to be the most challenging (which was not the experience of my co-observer), the transcript alone does not convey how the mood in the room turned at the midpoint of this five-minute extract (see Appendix 6, Unitized transcripts). In fact the text suggests a relatively light-hearted exchange with repeated bouts of laughter while in reality, as the group energy line suggests, this was an exceptionally spiky point of interaction.

The dramatic trough and peak evident in Figure 15 around the central point of conflict is the most graphic of the four examples in this chapter and showed me something that I would not have picked up on merely by listening to the recording and/or reading the transcript. Despite the high levels of verbal content in the group interaction, as indicated by the large number of meaning units across the five minutes, the interactions here are notable for the lack of whole group connection. This is not a group discussion and co-creation so much as a power tussle. The extract starts with a positive green mood and ends back there five minutes later. Between the two, the whole group goes on a small but intense journey with multiple behaviours identifiable in the fracturing and then rebuilding of relationship. There is very little cross-group conversation, with the dominant formation being pairs of individuals involved in inter-personal challenge (Units 13, 15 & 19); 'aside' discussions talking over the main current of conversation (see Unit 9, Unit 18); or attempts to turn the conversation in another direction entirely (P7, Units 14 and 16). One key voice (P6) threads throughout the whole extract, involved in one-to-one sparring with different members of the group across the field of tension – P10 in Unit 7, P8 in Units 13, 19 and 20. As with UK Group 1, there is a noticeable difference in the line before and after an extended central period of tension (*Figure 15*). The extract starts with a generally steady mood until around 2.25 minutes when there is sudden fall in both mood and engagement as the energy is sucked out of the room. This results in an extended silence at 2.44 before a surge upwards to a point of explosion at 3.15 when bad temper and group frustration are masked by laughter and 'jokes'.

After 3.15, the pattern changes as the group appears to work to re-establish connection in various ways in the second half of the extract, none of which are particularly successful. There are attempts to rebuild the group dynamic, with more voices joining the discussion

### UK Group 2 energy line



### Before and after the midway conflict point

**Before** – decline in mood

**After** – working to re-establish group

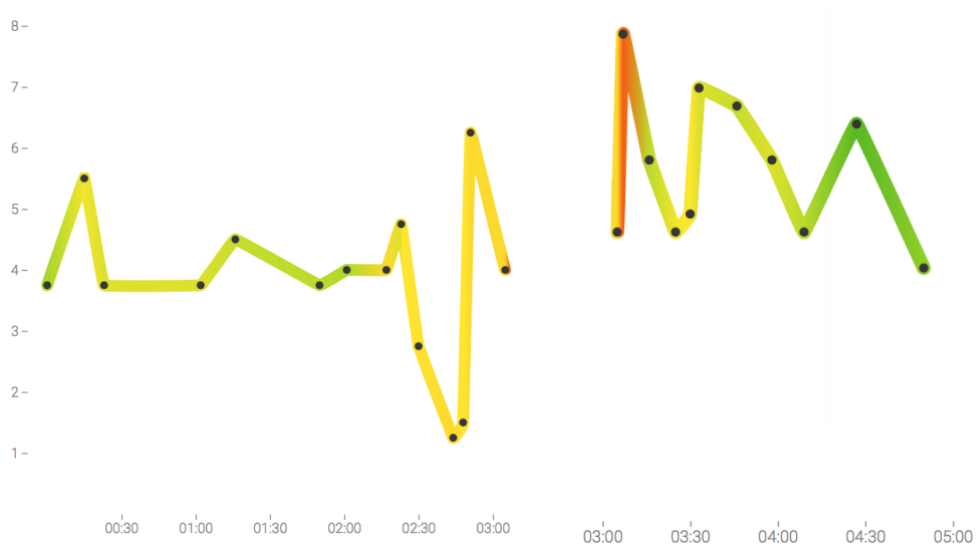


FIGURE 15 UK GROUP 2 ENERGY LINES

and contributions that seem aimed at both deflection and mood-lightening which do shift the mood slightly but fail to get traction before falling away again. A close reading of the text shows that there are three separate conversations and connections going on in the group at this point. P7 is quietly continuing on task and ignoring the commotion (Unit 14); P9 and P10 are carrying on a separate side conversation and in-joke (Unit 18); and P6 and P8 continue to spar around the main point of contention with P6 making clumsy attempts to re-establish connection with P8 (Units 19 and 20). As a result, a classic conflict escalation graph appears following the point of conflict at 2.15 and 3.10, with sharp climbs in mood/engagement followed - twice - by slow or rapid declines. This splintering of the group at this point is extremely interesting and is returned to in Chapter 6.

### Adding laughter to the energy line

Despite the spiky group interaction this extract shows the repeated use of laughter far more than in the other three studied here – 10 different laughter points across a five-minute extract (Table 4). Here, it is generally not laughter of warmth or enjoyment but has a slightly frantic, nervous and destructive character. The overall tone of the group as well as how laughter was used was established at the start of the session in the group's opening discussion about motivations after a long and awkward silence:

*P10     Alright... [? Laughing]. I just thought somebody should speak first, you know me, I can't he.. stop myself [Laughing at self – a bit. Pause] So... P9, why are you here?*

*General laughter*

*P9       Right... see but I always go first [Laughing, sort of] that's that's the thing...*

*P6       Well, here we are, you're going first again*

These unsure notes were made as I first transcribed this discussion, highlighting how confusing the function of laughter was in this group. In the clip above, P9 is ambushed by P6 and P10 within the first seconds of the group interaction who appear to dump their awkwardness onto him. It is P9 who punctuates the five minutes with a series of uncomfortable chuckles, side laughs and in-jokes across the field of tension, very little of which comes across as amusement or pleasant. Listening repeatedly to the recording of the field of tension, in-jokes between two participants feel like a device to separate themselves from the others, chuckles sound like a strategy to establish a presence in the group and

sarcasm is used to draw reluctant others into a 'joke'. This disconnect between laughter and enjoyment was also noted in discussions on our observations of the group immediately after the session. Although the group had spoken about how warm they felt towards each other:

- R ... I didn't feel any warmth in the room. I felt quite a lot of puzzlement and space between them, detachment. And I suppose I'm thinking of it, I'm feeling it as a lack of interest.*
- C-O and maybe that accounts for my feeling alone in that room; and maybe it was just a reflection of a lot of people there - a lot of people felt alone in that programme.*

Figure 16 suggests that in this group too there was a strong correlation between the timing and type of laughter and the direction of travel of group energy. In the first half of the extract, for example, both laughter occurrences accompany a fall in energy levels, with the second distinctly less 'pleasant' than the first as if anticipating the clash at 3.5 minutes. Thereafter, there is a change in both the frequency and type of laughter employed which seems to match the change in energy line pattern as the group works to re-establish some form of harmony. A more positive function for laughter is noticeable at 3.52-3.55, where three voices join in what feels like an attempt to re-establish relationships, and again soon after at 4.16 where there is an olive branch offered from the key protagonist in the central group clash. As with the visualizations of UK Group 1, there also seems to be a sense of the mood of the laughter pre-empting the group mood, as seen through the relationship between the colour grading of the laughter and the energy line.

TABLE 4 INCIDENTS OF LAUGHTER, UK GROUP 2

Timing	Participants	Description	Category
0.13-0.135	1 voice	in-joke	Self-focused / Divisive
0.18-0.185	1 voice	chuckle	Divisive
2.09-2.16	1 voice	sarcastic wind up / chuckle	Divisive / Self-focused
2.51-3.04	1-3 voices	ripple of voices, but not real amusement – coercion?	Self-focused / Divisive
3.32-3.34	1 voice	snide chuckle/ in-joke	Self-focused / Divisive
3.39-3.41	1 voice	loud – covering embarrassment?	Self-focused
3.52-3.55	3 voices	social laughter, lifting mood?	Cohesive / Self-focused
4.16-4.18	1 voice	Appeal to pacify, soften mood	Self-focused
4.41-4.44	1 voice	laughing at own in-joke	Self-focused
4.42-4.49	2 voices, then 1	laughing over conversation to ignore, one voice ongoing chuckle	Divisive / Self-focused



FIGURE 16 UK GROUP 2 ENERGY LINE PLUS LAUGHTER

### Summary

Here, then, the group energy line visualization did provide a useful analysis tool of the group dynamic. It showed clear patterns of interaction both before and after the central point of conflict that could easily have been missed without the visual of shifting group energy levels. This visualization was particularly striking for me as a conflict facilitator of communities, groups and organisations for 20 years as it led to a completely new observation about conflict dynamics. The visual evidence of the air being sucked out of the room before a moment of explosion demonstrates how warning signs, indicators of what is about to occur, are present as groups move into potentially difficult areas to negotiate. This observation has practical implications, suggesting that if a group was more aware of its own intra- and intergroup communications it would be able to identify fault lines in communication style and content in the moment. There is a potential contribution for sustainability here, with a visualization such as this providing a way to de-personalise the discussion about individual style and contribution to group mood.



In relation to collaboration and conflict, discussions in the observation and rating groups drew attention to two key themes in this group: competition between the participants which appeared to make it hard to talk about their organisations and their roles and which also contributed to their incomprehensible 'map'; and an ambiguity about why they took part in the research in the first place – what kind of feelings did they arrive with, how did these manifest in the room and what kind of feelings did they leave with? Given that the task instructions were left open in order to allow exactly this kind of emergent dynamic to appear, it suggests that the research design worked, surfacing the confusion within the collaborative system (and the individuals working inside it) about what their professional interactions should look like. What this example demonstrates so clearly is that when groups are not functioning well there are a number of ways that this manifests itself in the room – by withdrawal, lack of engagement and laughter just as much as by openly expressed anger or upset. The exaggerated use of laughter by one individual in particular was very striking. What was it about this group and the unexpressed feelings and atmosphere of this session that led to such a noticeable turn to laughter? In Chapter 7 I explore how this might link to the psychodynamic concept of individuals acting as a conductor for unexpressed tension in the group and in so doing providing a container for the group's unsafe feelings.

The splintering (splitting) of the group at various points across the extract and the group's insistence on their contribution to the collaboration map as individuals rather than as organisations and structures was also revealing. While the other three groups demonstrate a balance of both to one degree or another, here there was a ferocious focus on the individual/relational aspects of the work programme they were involved in. One possible reason could be that some of the organisations that they had been working for were extremely large (the UK government or a national quango, for example) and it might have seemed implausible to have represented themselves as those organisations. This draws attention to the importance of the individual in creating and maintaining successful collaborative work and might suggest that as multi-sectoral collaborations are scaled up the role of the individual becomes more prominent.

## NL Group 1 – Round 1 of data collection in the Netherlands

**The collaborative system** In 2014, Inkr8 ([www.inkr8.nl](http://www.inkr8.nl)) was invited by a joint group of two housing associations and the local authority to train local community facilitators in Almere Haven, a rapidly expanding town outside Amsterdam in the Netherlands. The invitation came because of divisiveness between the area's original inhabitants and new arrival communities (mainly Turkish and Moroccan) during a period of intense demographic change. Inkr8's programme of work was to allow residents and neighbours in social housing who were marginalized in a number of ways to get to know each other through training as community facilitators with the aim of a longterm reduction in local tensions. The commissioning group specifically asked Inkr8 to work with local residents' associations, traditionally seen as 'white' clubs. Over a period of two years, Inkr8 engaged with an extensive local collaborative system of both organisations and individuals to deliver skills training to 60-odd trainees in the local area. Most of those who took part in the NL Group 1 data collection session worked with Inkr8 in various unpaid and voluntary capacities, from management committee chair to on-the-ground trainer and programme manager. The group consisted of six individuals, four women aged 25-63 and two men aged 32 and 60. Four of the group were Dutch born, one man was originally from Morocco and one woman from Greece. One participant arrived halfway through the data collection session.

This data collection session was the most disrupted of the four. It was the first, with resulting glitches in technology and session management that were overcome in subsequent groups, and it was the most difficult to organize, despite months of lead-in time. It was also the most unmanageable on the day, with a noticeable lack of awareness of, or interest in, boundaries relating to the research process. As the session unfolded it became clear that this signified something central about this organisation. At two pre-meetings I had made considerable efforts to clarify what piece of work the group would focus on for the mapping task, who would attend and what their roles were within that specific piece of delivery work. I had asked for a meeting time that would generate the best thinking, planning months ahead, but the final session was arranged midweek between 7-9pm after a full working day in the middle of winter. The attendee list changed right up until the last moment, including the arrival in the session of one completely unexpected participant who Inkr8 had met in the previous week and who therefore knew nothing about the organization or its work. Another

participant arrived halfway through the session, wholly disrupting the group's flow and missing the first two tasks completely.

Working in Dutch, the group were invited to start the meeting with a round of personal accounts of their motivations for being at the meeting or their involvement with the organization. Participants mentioned enjoyment, valuing the connection with others through the work, sharing impactful skills with community members by *'giving people tools to actually influence their environment'* and personal growth: *'this work helps to continuously reflect on my own behaviour'*.

### Co-creating a map of the collaborative system

This is the group where fewest participants were involved in co-creating the map, mainly because the group re-negotiated in the room which collaborative system to focus on. This shift to a new piece of work in the moment undermined the research design and only took place because of my limited Dutch language skills and my subsequent lack of understanding of what had occurred until it was too late. As a result, what had been conceptualized as an opportunity for a group to work together became in the main the exposition of a piece of work by the two leads of the organisation. Only three of the five people in the room were directly engaged in the piece of delivery work chosen (the leads and the youngest participant in the research group who had been involved as a trainer) which in itself provided insight into how the organisation functions. This loose, unclear approach to the mapping task was mirrored in the way that the map was created. As the observer team noted later, there was no prior discussion or planning about how to approach the task or what a visual map might consist of. Instead, it emerged from the telling of a story about the piece of work with the addition of names to the map as they occurred in the narrative. The resulting map is hard to follow for someone who wasn't present at the meeting, lacking a key or any explanation of what is going on, and is noticeably focused on people as opposed to organisations. Inkr8 itself didn't appear on the map they created which provided an interesting line of inquiry when I met the two leads for a follow-up meeting a month after the data collection session:

*R       Where would Inkr8 be if you were on this map?*

*P11     We would be under the table*

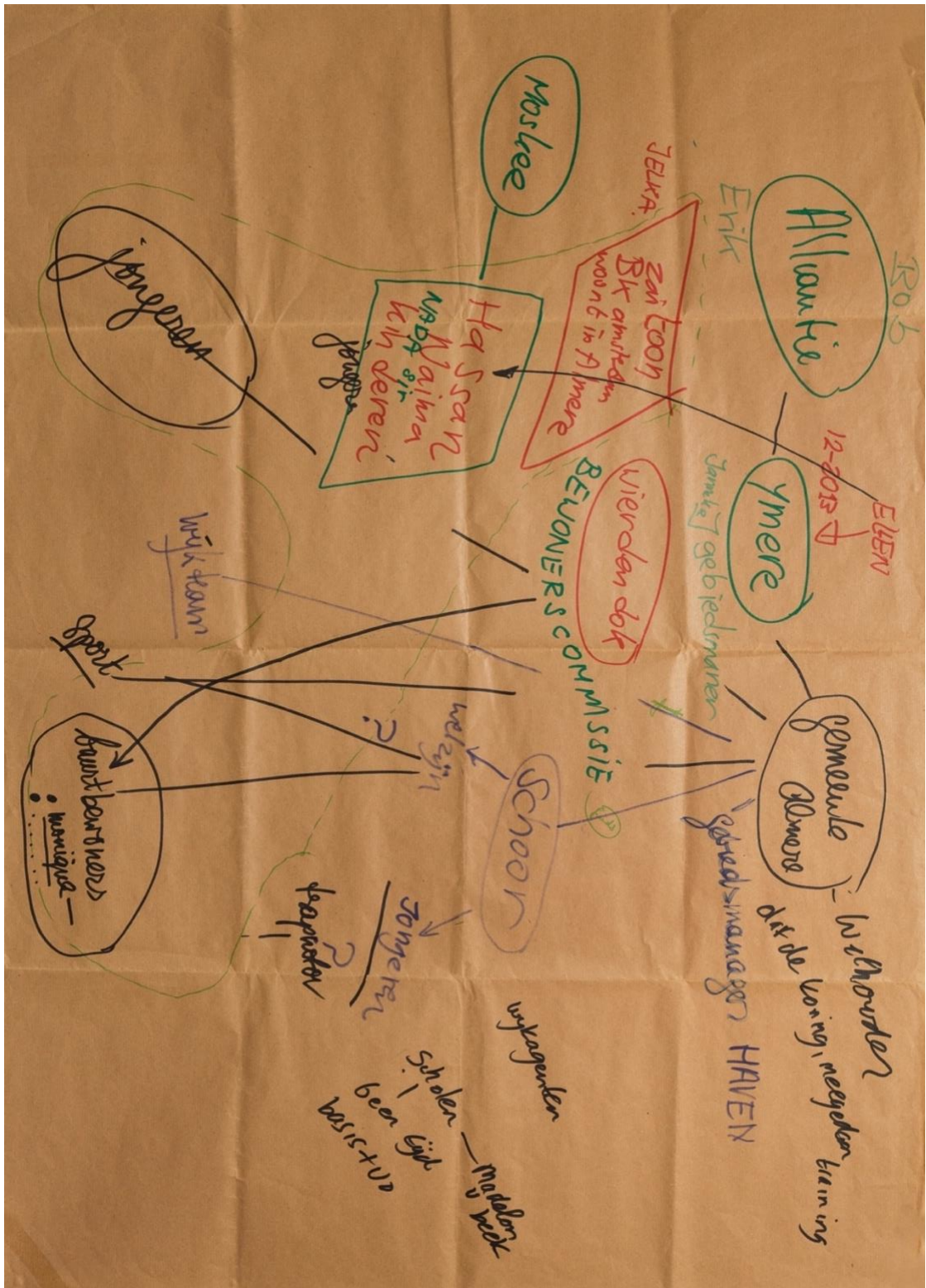


FIGURE 17 NL GROUP 1 MAP OF COLLABORATIVE SYSTEM

- P12 *Talking about camouflage... we would be a bubble... immediately when you see names of residents, we would love to be there, H-/N- and children, near them, to support them to deal with this*
- P11 *We don't want to sit in one of those organisations, that is becoming more and more clear*
- P12 *We would love to drive around with a little van...*
- P11 *Next plan, P15 will do that with P16*
- P12 *Inkr8 under cover, a camouflage net over the top of the van...*
- P11 *I don't know where we are ... not in this... I don't want here, here, here, we are not here, not here [vehement, hitting organisation names on the map]. A little here, yes. There, but not there*
- P12 *We are a mobile organisation - shall we draw a little car? And is it us or the whole organisation, because it is an organisation of people - right? They feel Inkr8 after all, more and more.*
- P11 *Actually yes. They are part of us.*
- P12 *I would draw a line around all the people who do not have a job in the neighbourhood actually, youngsters, key figures who want to develop to organise the society in a way that is at floor level - everybody who is not an organisation.*
- R *And where are you two?*
- P12 *This is our swimming pool [indicating area surrounded by dotted line they had just added to the map] so we swim in it.*

### Selecting a field of tension to visualize

Given the lack of group interaction during the creation of the collaborative map, there were no clear points of conflict or field of tension on which to focus the energy line visualization. Instead, I focused on the group dynamic that unfolded around the arrival of the latecomer, V15. The group interactions at this point were illuminating in relation to the organisation's inter-cultural dynamics which I return to in the following chapter. Here, however, I focus on the group energy line itself and what that shows.

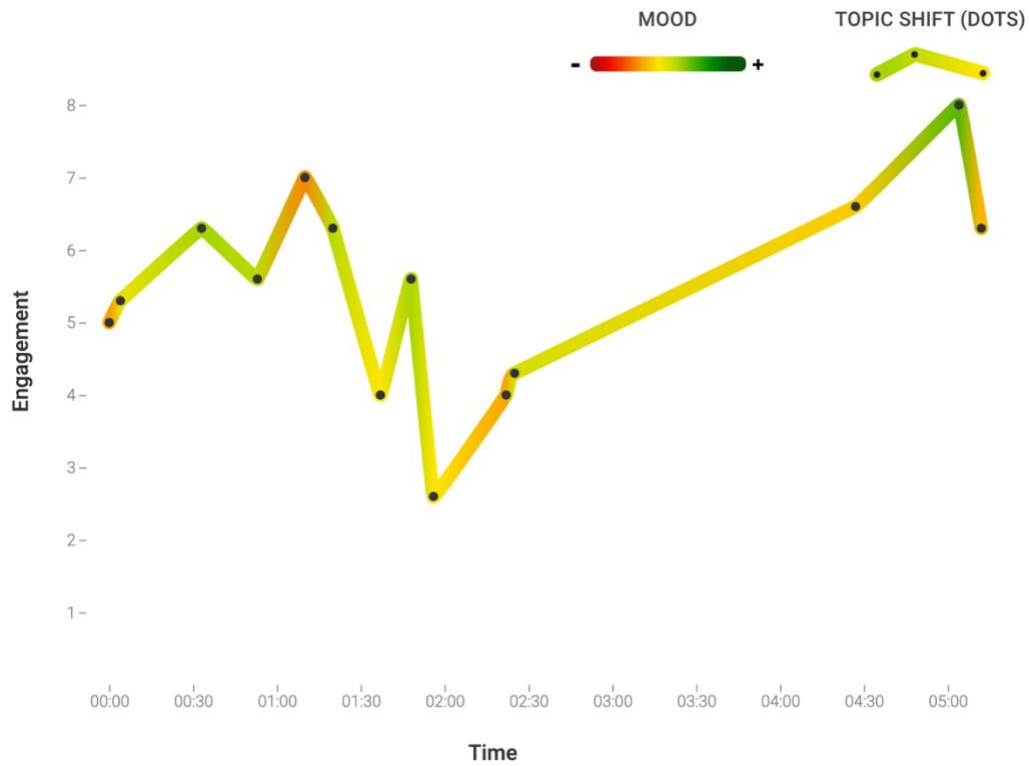
While there may not have been clear conflict in this group, there was an interesting moment of understated contradiction between the oldest (P13) and youngest (P14) participants in the room (Appendix 6, Unitized transcript - Unit 10 at 2.22 mins). At this point, once the latecomer has been welcomed and the group settled down again, there was an agreement to explain the map to him and me as the researcher in English (Unit 8). P12 begins to do this before stumbling over the word for *woningcorporatie* despite his fluent English. Contrary to

what had already been agreed by the group, P13 immediately suggests that the map should be explained to the late arrival in Dutch while almost at the same moment P14 quietly reinforces the agreement to explain it in English by providing the translation – housing corporation. This is an intriguing interaction because of its low-key nature and because it was completely ignored in the room. As P12 moved seamlessly and without comment back into Dutch, against the request of the researcher and the previous group agreement, it was clear which voice had prevailed. While this was understandable on many levels – not least because the group had been working in Dutch up to that point and therefore were thinking about the task from that mindset – it indicates how the group was not particularly concerned about the rationale for them being together in the first place: for the research. This moment in the group interaction was also interesting because of how I experienced it as the researcher, and it highlighted a tension around my positionality in the research – as researcher, as group facilitator and as a non-Dutch ‘outsider’, unfamiliar with both the language and norms.

At the time, and then again when re-reading and listening to the recording of the session, I experienced P13’s intervention as aggressive - in a passive and therefore acceptable way - and directed at both the speaker at the time and me. As the most ‘senior’ person in the room (the eldest, the chair of the management committee and with a responsible role in public life) I had found P13 challenging from the moment of her arrival in the research space, with her numerous attempts to control the environment, to move the session at her pace and to re-order what I was doing. I was aware of this personal bias as I selected this extract to focus on but decided to proceed in part because psychodynamic observation approaches suggest that what you experience personally in the space as an observer in some way mirrors what is happening in the group you are observing. Reassuringly, the rater team and my co-observer at the time also picked up on the strained dynamic around P13:

*C-O P13 – what role was she taking in the group? It was like she hadn’t chosen to be there – aggressive, neglecting, phoning, pushing the boundaries around task, time, territory. Very challenging to you as the researcher... How does she connect? At times, it felt like she was ignoring me, exclusion in action: ‘In-kr8’ and ‘Out-kr8’.*

## NL Group 1 energy line



**Before** – welcoming late comer

**After** – recounting the case study

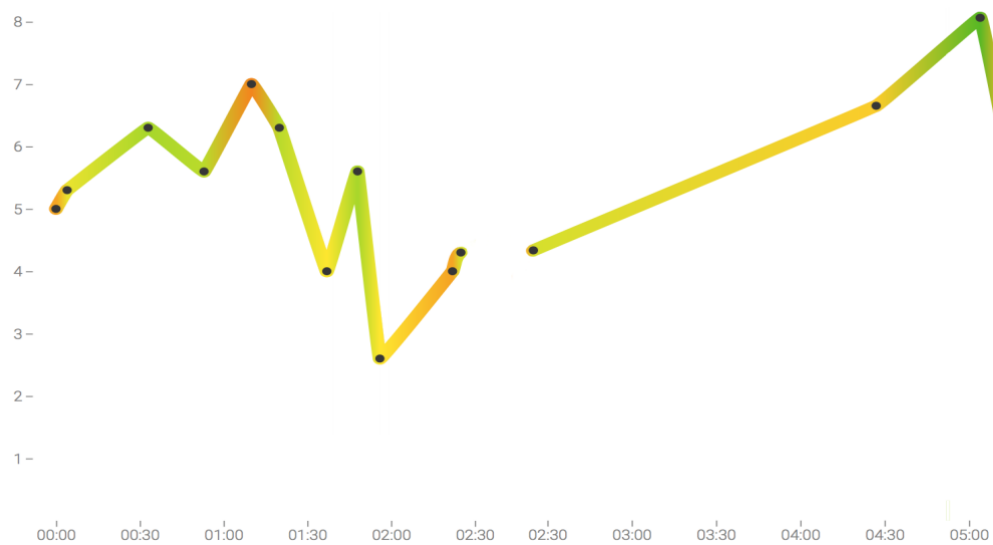


FIGURE 18 NL GROUP 1 ENERGY LINES

The energy line visualization for this group generated a number of new ideas and information during analysis. One was the noticeably fewer number of meaning units across the selected five-minute extract than in the previous two groups. Another was the unexpectedly low scores for mood which came as a surprise as this was not my memory of the session overall. My poor recall was perhaps impacted by my anxieties around logistics for this first data collection encounter and/or by working in a language I was less than fluent in, both of which highlight the fragility of the researcher and their generation of research findings. It could also relate to issues of interrater reliability and the impact of different cultural frames on research findings, using culture here in its broadest sense and including nationality, language, gender and age. As discussed earlier, the cross-cultural team of raters was remarkably consistent in its scoring across the extracts although this group was one of the exceptions. My response to the tone of the main speaker was very different to those of my co-raters and as a result I consistently scored the mood of the group interactions higher than my colleagues (see rater scores on the website).

As with the previous energy lines, the resulting visualization (Figure 18) shows two distinct patterns of interaction before and after the arrival of the late participant. On this occasion, however, the line shows a spiky, less settled start and then a steadier second half. The movement in the first half of the extract relates to the effusive welcoming of the late participant while the second half relates to the retelling of the story of the map mostly by a single voice, P12. The falling mood of the first stretch may relate in part to the language stand-off at 2.30 minutes and is in direct contrast to the smoother line between 2.30 – 5.00 minutes due the stage of the task that has been reached at this point of recapping the map. The line also highlights a marked difference in communication style of P11 and P12, the two founders and chief organisers of Inkr8. The smooth line as P12 recaps the delivery story in the second half ends with a sudden dip in engagement and mood as P11 comments. As I worked on the analysis of the extract with the visualization, I reflected on whether I would have picked up on this difference working with the transcript alone.

### Adding laughter to the energy line

It was while thinking about how laughter was employed by this group that I started to become aware of the discrepancies in laughter use between the UK and NL. Laughter across



this extract was minimal and seemed to be serving a particular function, one that I had not encountered in the analysis of the UK groups (Table 5). Here, it seemed to be used primarily to create group cohesion, perhaps mirroring an oft-stated Dutch preference for *gezellig* (cosy) relations in group situations. On close re-listening, the laughter at 1.30 and 1.56 occurred primarily around the effusive welcoming of the late participant, as if reassuring him that no offence had been taken or harm done – although in reality, the group flow had been completely disrupted with a resulting impact on the research data. In fact it seemed to me that the laughter was ‘social’ laughter on all three occasions, performing a function of cohesion or solidarity rather than conveying any real warmth or amusement, including the example towards the end of the extract – at 4.52 – when it seemed to be used to ease the frustration of the speaker, P11.

TABLE 5 INCIDENTS OF LAUGHTER, NL GROUP 1

Timing	Participants	Description	Category
1.30-1.38	5 voices in sequence	Welcoming/group building	Cohesive
1.56-1.59	3 voices	In agreement with others/speaker	Cohesive
4.52-4.53	2 voices	Speaker (in frustration) + support	Self focused / cohesive

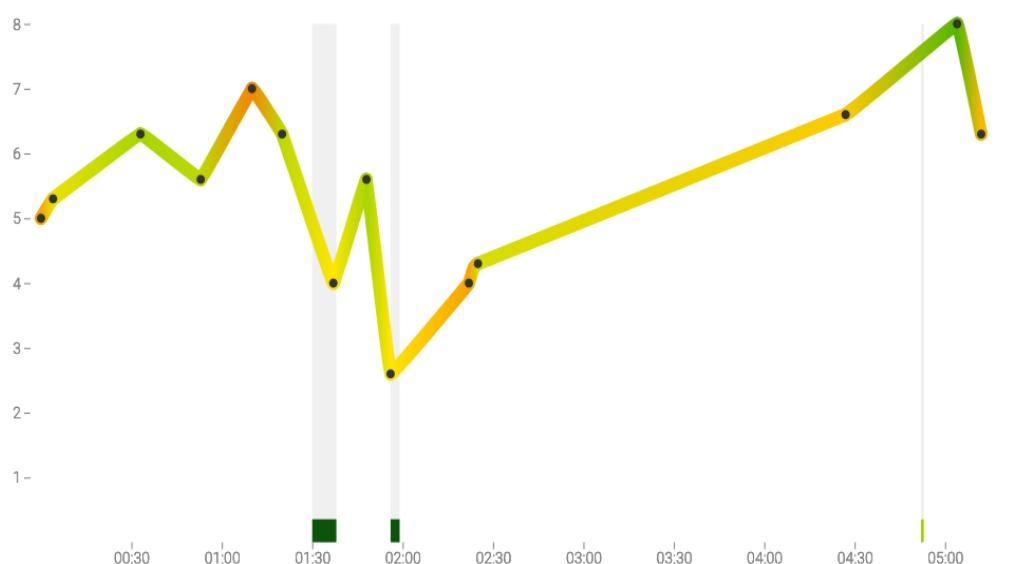


FIGURE 19 NL GROUP 1 ENERGY PLUS LAUGHTER

## Summary

The visualization of this group's energy line produced yet another unexpected result, indicating a pervasive negativity underpinning the entire extract. This surprised me and provided a visual prompt to rethink my memory of the session by drawing my attention as researcher to the impact of personal and cultural framings of the data. This result came from the clear differences in how the rater team (two men and one woman, two Dutch and one English) responded to what they were listening to. This in turn threw up useful reflections about research methodology and its reliability when there is a single researcher building conclusions from their response to texts and audio recordings.

In relation to collaboration and conflict, the psychodynamic understanding of the interactions in the room – from the relationship between the map produced, the process that that involved and the nature of organisation itself, to the experiences of the observation team in relation to the group dynamic – provided a parallel lens through which to understand the group process. It was listening to this group that I first noted how laughter was apparently being used to create a harmonious environment, on the surface at least, and to smooth over potentially troublesome dynamics. As a result, I began to wonder how and if this could throw further light on working practices in the groups as well as how these results related to the wider collaboration and social systems that the collaborations formed part of.

When all three ways of understanding the group dynamic across the extract were combined (the visualizations, the observation and the laughter lines) a thick and insightful picture emerges of what happened in the room on that day and what was simultaneously going on under the surface. The contradictions between these two point to useful indicators for practice around collaboration and conflict.

## NL Group 2 – Round 2 of data collection in the Netherlands

Participants for Round 2 of the Dutch data collection were selected during a follow-up meeting with Inkr8 and drawn from the range of individuals and organisations included on NL Group 1's map (*see list, next page*). Despite plenty of notice, this session also seemed

hard to coordinate. The final group consisted of five participants: two male, three female, all white Dutch aged 35-65 except one female Moroccan-born participant in her 30s. Three represented commissioning bodies for the work – two housing associations and the local authority – while the other two were a retired headmistress in the local area and a local parent and Inkr8 trainee. One person had to leave the session halfway through. My Dutch co-observer commented on how little history there seemed to be between the individuals in the room, reflecting on whether that was related in some way to the nature of Almere Haven, an expanding ‘new town’ outside Amsterdam that had traditionally been white and working class. The area was experiencing rapid demographic change at a time when the Far Right and populist parties were gaining traction because of the movement of Syrian refugees into mainland Europe, including the arrival of some 15000 refugees a month into the Netherlands at the time of data collection.

The difficulty in assembling even this small group implied limited interest in the research, possibly because it was hard to see how it could contribute to their work as busy

#### **Entities involved in NL collaborative system as identified by NL Group 1**

- Neighbourhood team coordinator
- Mosque
- Aldermen
- De Schoor (welfare organisation)
- Youth clubs
- Local police
- Neighbourhood mediation service
- Local media - Buurt TV
- Residents associations – various ethnic groupings: white Dutch, Moroccan
- Youth organisations
- Neighbourhood facilitators
- Inkr8 trainees
- Housing associations (paying for work)
- Local Authority (paying for work)
- Sports organisations
- Schools
- Individual residents

professionals. The observer team later discussed the participants' changeability re attendance in relation to the Dutch word *vrijblijvendheid*, meaning a casual, non-binding agreement without commitment. As before, the group started with an invitation to talk about why they had come but kept their introductions to a minimum, sharing enthusiasm for the work – '*Wow! What they are doing here is great. I am a fan of their working method.*' – alongside some more muted and nuanced comment: '*Their work is indeed very valuable*' said one, and another spoke of participating in '*the training programme for inhabitants*'. This qualification of 'for inhabitants' is significant, suggesting a professional stance that separated them from both the work and its recipients, a distance that recurred in different forms during the data collection sessions, as discussed in Chapter 6.

### Co-creating a map of the collaborative system

This group worked together steadily, quietly, to create a map. Two relentlessly upbeat members of the group (P18 and P21) held and coordinated the group space from the start, possibly because of their roles within the collaborative structure: P18 is a funder of the work and senior local authority figure, while P21 was from the key commissioning organisation. P21 took the lead with a strongly task-focussed approach, possibly because she knew she was leaving the session early, inviting others to draw in turn as they talked about their roles - what they did and who they were connected to. As a result there was little debate or co-creation, more an orderly sequential development of a slightly thin image of the collaborative structure (*Figure 20*). The end result has the delivery organisation, Inkr8, in the centre of the map surrounded (? smothered) by its *partner netwerk*. While the process was constructive, it wasn't exciting and there was a latent sense of some things being able to be said in the space and others not.

Watching the participants be polite to each other, I reflected on whether there was a link between how this meeting was played out and the consensual nature of wider Dutch politics and social norms. Although the atmosphere was pleasant, and everyone agreed with each other or stayed quiet, a reluctance in two participants in particular felt as if they were acting out unarticulated thoughts and feelings. This group of professionals didn't know each other that well, which might account for the sense of holding back. Nonetheless, there were similarities here to other interactions I had observed in the Netherlands over the course of

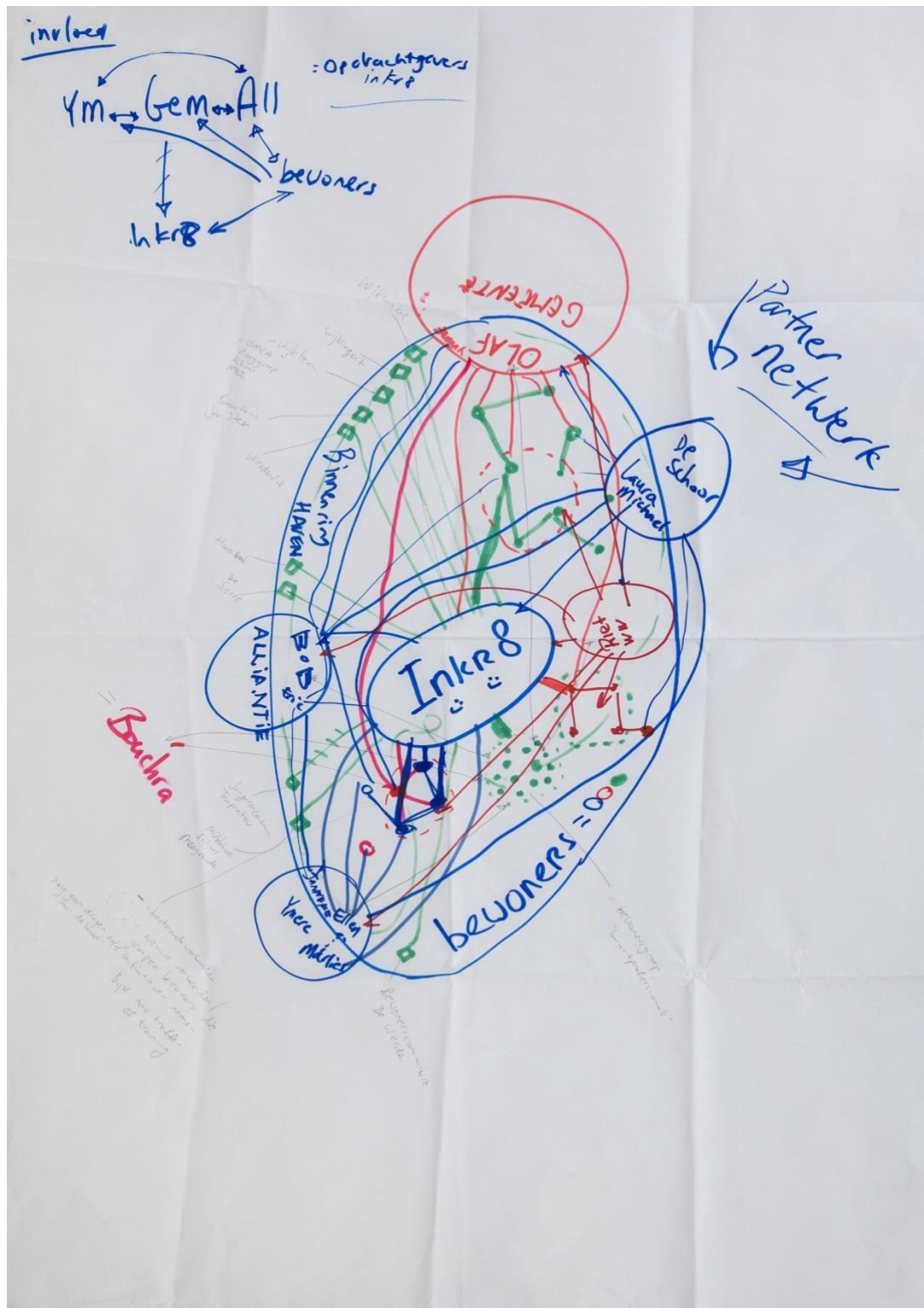


FIGURE 20 NL GROUP 2 MAP OF THE COLLABORATIVE SYSTEM

the research and in the previous Dutch data collection session. My impression was of a consensual but at times politely passive aggressive stance which allowed meetings to continue and everyone to interact but where people often self-censored, reluctant to say what they really felt in case relationships in the room started unravelling. For me, as a conflict trainer, this suggests that they felt ill-equipped to manage or unpack the differences that might emerge and so instead chose to remain quiet. That reflection is in contrast to how the Dutch (and others) tend to think of themselves: as exceptionally straight forward and plain speaking.

### Selecting a field of tension to visualise

Given the quiet group dynamic, identifying a field of tension to visualize was difficult. The recordings and transcript demonstrate no obvious points of conflict, no real change in tempo, mood or engagement. As a result, I centred the extract on a moment of awkwardness (as strong an emotion as I could identify) between two individuals in the group - again the oldest (P19) and the youngest (P17). This process of selection threw up another awareness of the subjective nature of research - where we as researchers choose to put our attention. In this example, the focus on this particular moment relates to my interest in the micro-power relations operating between members of majority and minority cultures (explored further in Chapter 6). My co-raters had no such focus or interest, and although the interaction between the two individuals was noted in the rating discussions when creating the energy line, it was scored very differently by them and me (see the rater scores on the website: <https://stuijfzand-data.com/space-between-visualisations>).

This visualization of the group energy line (*Figure 21*) is indeed an accurate representation of the meeting I observed: striking in its lack of dynamism. The group interaction was slow and focussed in a detached, verging-on-disinterested way. There are very few meaning points on the graph based on a short five-minute transcript shows (see Appendix 6), with less conversation compared to other groups and with long silences and relatively static mood and engagement levels. Just one single meaning unit (Unit 5 between 2.33 and 3.00) dips below a 'neutral' mood. At that point, P19, a white Dutch woman in her late 50s who was until recently the head of a local school sat with her arms crossed across the table from P17, an open and smiling Moroccan Dutch woman in her 30s. Their interaction at this point is

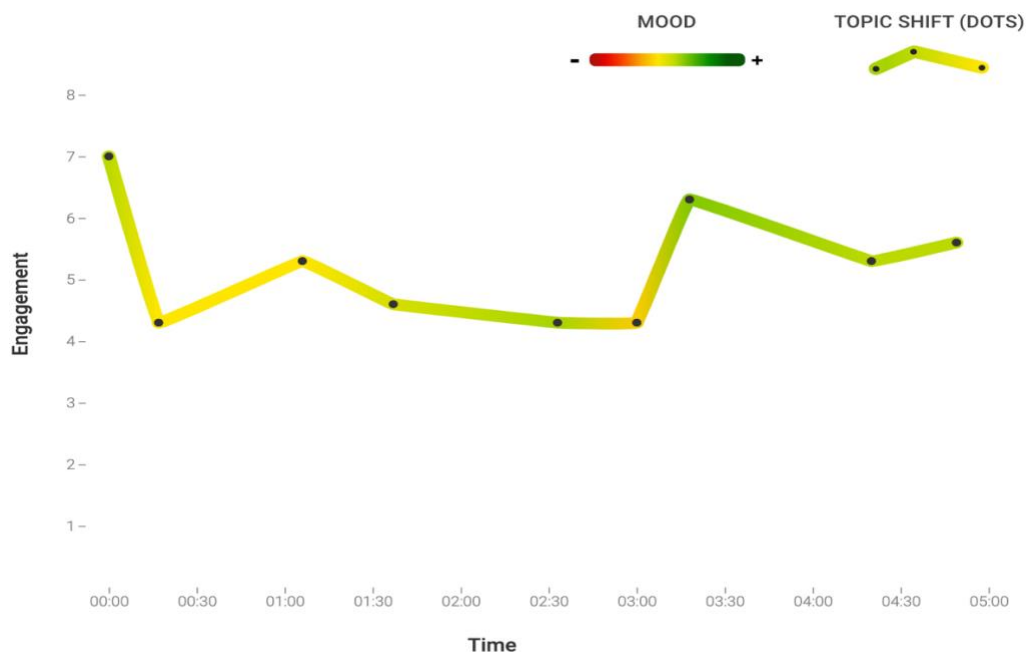


FIGURE 21 NL GROUP 2 ENERGY LINE

about whether they have met before: the young woman says they have, the older woman says she doesn't know her. The unspoken subtext of this moment is made clearer by nonverbal signals – embarrassed laughter from the younger woman, anxious stuttering by the older one – and signals a dynamic between the two that emerges again later in the data collection session (Chapter 6).

Although it is muted, this group energy line also shows a 'before and after' impact, with a slight shift upwards in both mood and engagement directly after the moment of awkwardness. As this shift is so slight I have not highlighted it here with separate diagrams but the lift in the energy line and increasing 'green' in mood does suggest a similar group need to re-establish relationship as seen in the three previous examples - albeit in a manner befitting such a detached group.

## Adding laughter to the energy line

It was while rating this extract for mood and engagement that the idea of 'social laughter' was first mooted in the rater group discussions. Although the group used little laughter, its function was striking. The first laughter point in the extract demonstrates how people join into laughter, starting with a single voice at 0.03 but involving all five participants by 0.06. Across that short period the laughter seems to serve a number of different purposes from general group formation to approval and encouragement. The second incident of laughter following the interchange between P17 and P19 at Unit 5 seems to fulfil a different range of social functions, from covering embarrassment and lightening tension to deflecting passive aggressive vibes (accentuated in the space by the body language of P19) and to offer support (from P18 to P17).

TABLE 6 INCIDENTS OF LAUGHTER, NL GROUP 2

Timing	Participants	Description	Category
0.03-0.06	1 voice to 5	Group formation, approval (although not quite genuine)	Cohesive
2.45-2.50	1 voice to 3 voices to 1 voice	Speaker (embarrassment) + support/group building	Self focused / cohesive

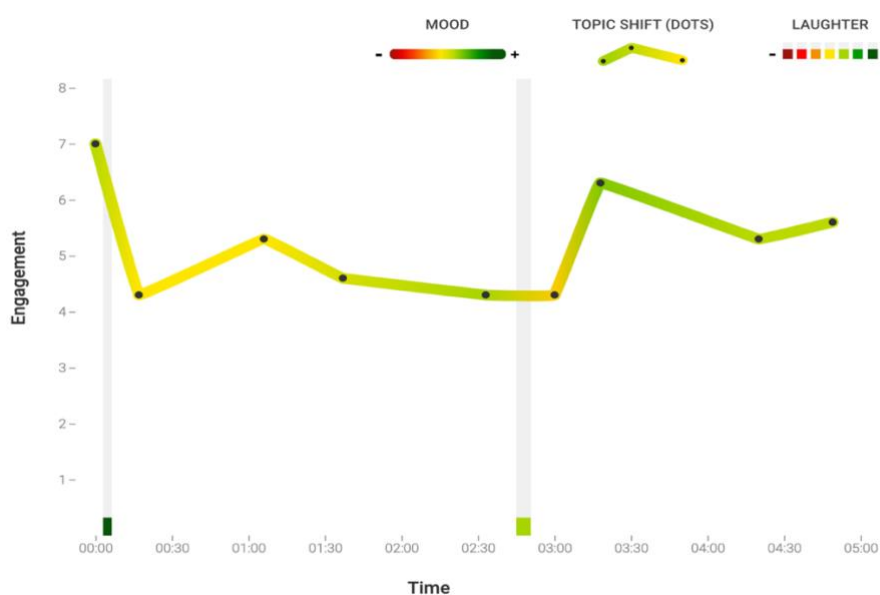


FIGURE 22 NL GROUP 2 ENERGY LINE PLUS LAUGHTER



## Summary

This energy line visualization is an accurate representation of the meeting I observed - quiet, focussed but detached. The understated nature of this group is reflected in the understated nature of the energy line it generated, which suggests that the visualization method used here is managing to reflect the tone of the group to some degree. In this extract, you can again clearly see a connection between the use of laughter and the group dynamic thanks to the linking of the two layers of visualization. Both were striking examples of 'social' laughter with a range of different functions illustrated within two short incidents across the five minutes – none of which suggested real amusement or enjoyment but both of which appear to have group cohesion as their aim.

In relation to collaboration and conflict, it is notable that the only moment of tension in this group was one filled with a sense of things that were able to be said and those that could not be said. The combination of body language, silence and laughter spoke volumes about unstated feelings and emotions. Topics that are unspoken or avoided are often the very topics that need talking about, prompting the question: what does avoiding certain topics mean in relation to decision making and a sense of ownership by a group or individuals and organisations within a collaboration? A working culture that keeps difficult conversations out of the room/meetings in order to preserve a sense of consensual and positive agreement highlights how a lack of engagement with conflicting views can undermine collaborative robustness and integrity.

The observation data relating to this group highlighted a further consideration: that the dynamics of collaboration are impacted by place, history and context as much as individuals and organisations. The question was asked: what does a lack of shared history and connection allow or inhibit? Perhaps, as my co-observer pointed out, *'you can actually build things very easily, in a fast way, cos you don't have this long history of difference and the past, you can just start from scratch'*.

## Comparisons across the groups

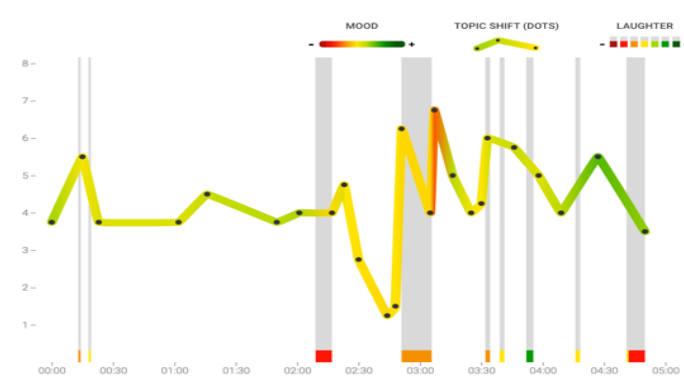
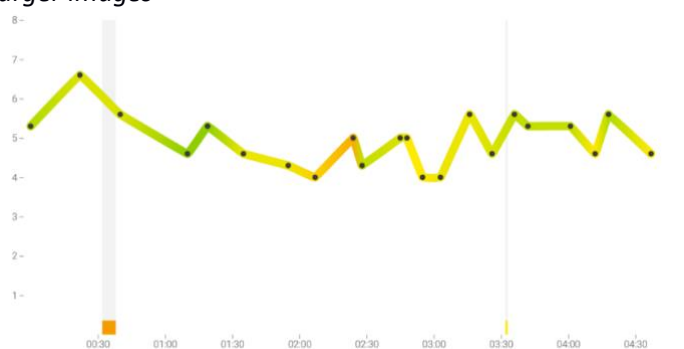
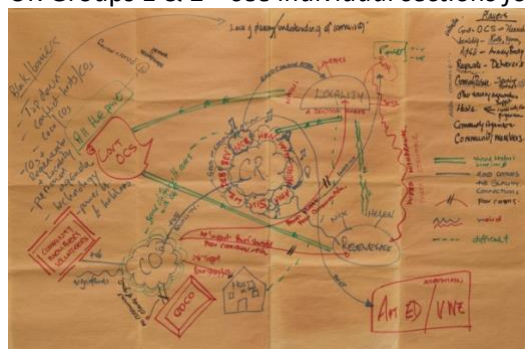
The research design aimed to surface emergent thought processes and unconscious group dynamics in relation to collaboration and conflict in the four task groups. It was also conceived in terms of studying two distinct collaborative systems and looking at whether there were similarities across those systems. As can be seen by the maps and energy lines in Figure 24, there is a marked diversity both in the maps the groups produced and in the energy and laughter lines generated by the visualization methodologies used. There is no attempt or interest here to judge or rank any of the outputs - merely to note the similarities and differences. In subsequent chapters, I reflect on how these patterns contribute to understanding the dynamics of collaboration and conflict in these four groups.

Despite producing such markedly different visualisations, there are clear similarities across the two groups in the UK system. Both 5-minute transcripts were long and broke down into some 20+ meaning units (UK Group 1 – 22; UK Group 2 – 24). This suggests a similarly high level of interaction and quickfire discussion across both groups, which then translated into dynamic energy lines which illustrate rapid shifts of topic, mood and engagement. The energy lines both become especially active following a central point of conflict suggesting additional effort and input from both participant groups to re-establish a positive group mood. When the function of laughter was added to the two lines, another similarity emerged. In both groups, there was a correlation between the use of laughter and the onset of points of conflict, with laughter used more as a tool for getting or deflecting attention or for point scoring than for building group cohesion.

Where the two groups differ considerably is around the coherence of their maps. UK Group 1 created a comprehensive schematic of the collaboration which is relatively easy to follow and includes additional information from key players in the system to how communication channels operated across the collaboration as a whole. The observer / reflection team were surprised by its completeness:

RF      *There is so much more data in this first map than the second one [UK Group 2], more dimensions. Map 1 is unbelievably detailed*

UK Groups 1 & 2 – see individual sections for larger images



NL Groups 1 & 2

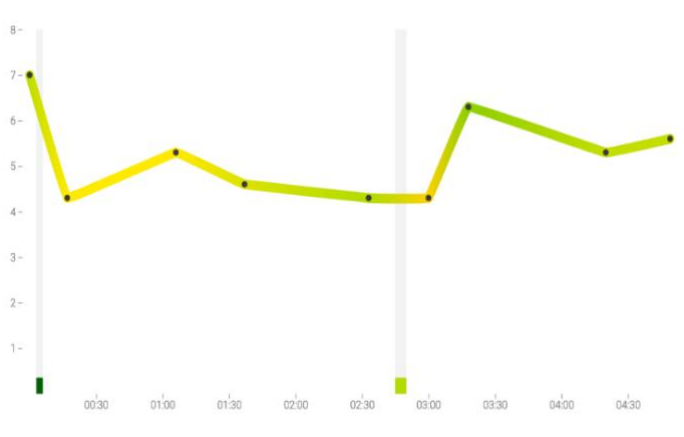
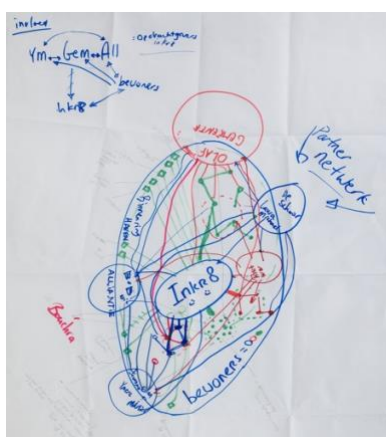
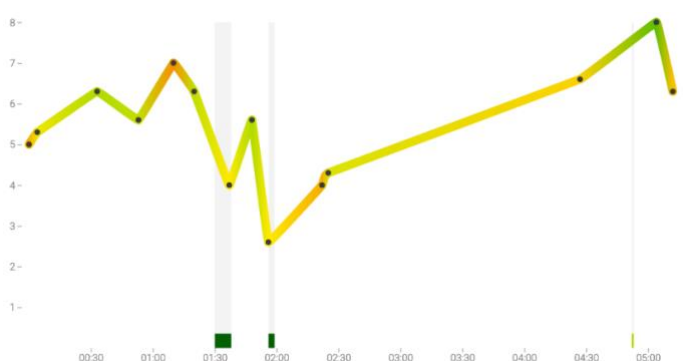


FIGURE 23 COMPARISON OF VISUAL OUTPUTS OF THE GROUPS

- C-O *Yes. They had the same time, the same task, the same agenda, and they came up with this*
- RF *It's really amazing. So it looks like they... it's part of their work, that they know who they are. And maybe it is because they have worked together for a long time.*
- C-O *Perhaps it's because they are on their primary task, as communicators*
- R *They are all trained facilitators, think of themselves as facilitating other people's ideas rather than being the people who take decisions, as a cog in the wheel as opposed to being the wheel.*
- C-O *So then they have a really strong awareness of what they are doing in the wider context*
- R *They must have cooperated really well to achieve that amount of work [referring to map]*

The map of UK Group 2 is much less clear with an unexpected and incomprehensible focus on individuals rather than structures, organisations or communication channels. This was perhaps to be anticipated to some degree as Group 1 were coming from within a single organisation and therefore shared an organisational culture, while the participants in Group 2 were bringing multiple organisational perspectives with them to manage alongside their personal communication styles and worldviews. Nonetheless, there is a sense of competitive dysfunction in their final map heightened by the layers of disordered post-its notes and individual names.

The visualizations generated by two groups from the Netherlands also showed marked similarities. Once transcribed, the 5-minute extracts for both groups were far shorter generating just 14 meaning units in Group 1 and 9 in Group 2. This implies a discussion style that was slower and possibly more thoughtful. The transcripts show few examples of people interrupting or talking over each other in the Dutch groups which maybe why they translate into energy lines that feel calm and less frantic. When the laughter points were added to the energy lines, a second point of similarity emerged. In both groups, laughter was used almost exclusively to create group cohesion rather than to promote any one individual or their ideas in any way. Here, laughter didn't provoke conflict but was used to avoid it or patch it up.

The maps generated by the two Dutch groups were also very different, however. The map generated by NL Group 1 was hard to follow, not least because the delivery organisation at

the heart of the collaboration didn't include themselves on the map. This is significant and possibly demonstrates a lack of awareness of themselves in relationship to others and their impact and relevance to the wider systems that they are engaging with. NL Group 2 produced a clearer, more methodical map clearly focused Inkr8's delivery programme and which delivered on most of the elements requested in the groups' original mapping instructions.

*R        I always thought the 2nd Round map was going to be more complex for them to do than the 1st Round map, in both countries. But I think what's interesting is that NL Group 2 map has much more coherence than UK Group 2, with Inkr8 at centre and them surrounding it as a network.*

*C-O      Yes, that's how they experienced their networks. It speaks of their experience of working.*

It is important to restate that these analysis visualizations are based on only a 5-minute segment of a two-hour data collection session, and the field of tension extracts are focused on points when the group flow is interrupted in some way. As a result, they are not wholly representative of the group dynamic across whole data collection session. Nonetheless, when the four energy lines are looked at together (*Figure 23*), the potential in the visualization of qualitative group interaction becomes clearer. Just as the observer group reflected on the difference between the maps despite the groups having an identical task to follow, so the energy lines are fascinatingly different in feel and pattern. UK Group 2 and NL Group 1 both show a distinct fall in energy before the group recovers itself, and UK Group 1 and NL Group 2 both show a steadier consistency – reflected in their maps – albeit of a different nature. The difference of the lines is reassuring, giving a sense that all four groups were different in the ways they interacted – as indeed they were.

## Conclusion

The variety in the four energy lines suggests that this qualitative visualization approach is picking up on a range of different meetings styles, as well as being capable of pointing groups – and researchers - towards a number of different aspects of group interaction and

interesting lines of inquiry in relation to internal group dynamics. Although this was an explorative research design, both in terms of the repeated interactive data collection format and in terms of aiming to visualize the shifts in energy flow as the four groups worked together, it does appear to have generated thick and accessible data. In the following chapter I use these visualizations as a starting point to dig deeper into the micro-power relations in each of the groups using data collected across the whole of each two-hour session.

## Chapter 6:

### Findings 2 - Negotiating 'the space between'

In the previous findings chapter, I focussed on the fluctuation in group energy levels across one specific field of tension as each group co-created a map of their delivery system. What emerged was a constant flow of exchange, negotiation, stand-off and compromise as participants worked to hold themselves together as a group (which requires stability) while exploring new ideas and taking decisions (which requires movement and flexibility). The selected fields of tension were centred around points in the group interaction when contradictory values, behaviours or needs entered the space between participants. Such moments are full of potential and creativity but also of threat and anxiety and are specific timebound experiences. What determines whether such negotiations lead to creative outcomes, such as an opportunity to understand other perspectives better or to co-create new ideas, depends largely on the group culture in place at that specific moment in time – who is in the room, their rules of engagement (agreed or not, formal and informal) and how well they connect.

Individuals in any collaborative work venture come into the collaborative space accompanied by their various identities and values, self-interests and fears. Once in a room together, they have to negotiate several levels of potential conflict, from managing their own internal contradictions and the differences between their own value frames and those of others they are working with; differences between their personal values and interests and those of the organisations they represent; and as an organisational representative, differences of organisational cultures across the spectrum of collaborative partners. Transcending these layers of difference requires clarity about the various organisational paradigms and goals in the room, which might range from a linear and task-focused managerial mindset to relationally-inclined community engagement teams.

In this chapter, I explore the mechanisms and strategies used by research participants as they arrived at and then negotiated such points of conflict, drawing on the fields of tension visualized in Chapter 5 as well additional data from the study. What I found was that the participants in all groups used multiple strategies to engage with conflict, from clash,

indignation or ignoring the event altogether alongside more subtle withdrawals from the space or the nuanced enforcement of entitlement or privilege. Most strategies appeared to aim to minimise or avoid points of conflict rather than proactively naming and exploring them. There is evidence here of how micro-power relations are played out through prisms ranging from seniority and age to status, race and gender, and of the significance of interpersonal relationships on the sustainability of collaboration, at times superseding any organisational agreements and protocols.

When reading this chapter, I recommend having to hand the transcripts of the four unitized fields of tension (Appendix 6). The chapter concludes with a summary of implications for sustainable collaboration in environments that bring together very different types of knowledge and value frames.

## The values task

As well as revisiting the fields of tension, this chapter draws extensively on data collected during participants' small and whole group discussions around values. The values task is a well-known exercise among facilitators, often used to bring a team or group to consensus. It was initially included in order to explore the underpinning paradigms of participants at an individual, organisational and collaborative level and to generate data on how their stated values in the research space correlated or contradicted their behaviours across the rest of the session, especially when they felt pressured by lack of time (as in the real world). In addition, it was useful as a vehicle to elicit the strategies participants used to manage disagreements around their values at both a personal and a professional level.

Although our values steer and influence us all across the life course, there is no definitive list of values an individual can hold, ranging as they do from the social and the useful to the economic and the aesthetic. Asking participants to choose just four values from a list of 100 in just three minutes is not presented here as a serious study of participants' core values. What this task did do, however, is provide insight into how value orientations cross the micro, meso and macro levels of human interaction – in this context, from the personal to the private and the professional (Bachika 2011). There is a recent resurgence of interest



among social scientists in the idea that individual value sets remain unaltered even as contexts experience rapid change. The task design first surfaced participants' own value sets as they worked alone and then collected data on how they then modified these through discussion with others. As hoped, it did indeed generate some useful insights into how values shifted (or not) as participants encountered different definitions and ideas of what each value meant. The final four values each group chose were remarkably consistent across all groups - *'at least we're not fighting over 'obedience''* one participant pointed out to general laughter – with some interesting outliers and differences across the two countries which provided an unexpected insight into how differently the UK and Dutch groups approached their negotiations (Table 7).

TABLE 7 VALUES TASK RESULTS

UK Group 1	UK Group 2	NL Group 1	NL Group 2
Whole group final four: <b>Consciousness, integrity, happiness, love</b>	Whole group final four: <b>Consciousness, bravery, integrity, openness</b>	Whole group final four: <b>Compassion, equality, pleasure, respect</b>	Whole group final four: <b>Integrity, respect, connection, freedom</b>
Small Group A: Kindness, responsibility, integrity, resilience	Small Group A: Bravery, integrity, consciousness, growth	Small Group A: Compassion, attention, authenticity, responsibility	Small Group A: Integrity, respect, connection, openness
Small Group B: Love, consciousness, happiness, honesty	Small Group B: Openness, compassion, bravery, deep listening	Small Group B: Pleasure, respect, equality, openness	Small Group B: Respect, freedom, honesty, development

However in the context of this research, it was the under-the-surface group dynamics illuminated by the task that were especially valuable, and particularly in relation to positioning and power. It was instructive to see whose knowledge was deemed more insightful and why and how easily individuals redefined and even abandoned values in the process of discussion. There was evidence of how theories and teachings were threaded through the way individuals engaged with their worlds and of how wider social contexts and norms impacted on the values they selected. It also highlighted the range of approaches participants took to each task depending on their personalities and their response to pressure – just as in everyday working environments:

- P2 *'I can remember starting off really task-oriented, oh I just want to get the bloody, you know, oh let's just get some words, you know and kind of and and then beginning to realise, oh it's not about that, it's about us really kind of understanding ourselves better, each other better, it's about the meat of it, it's the process-sy bit...'*
- P5 *'The values, looking at the words we were trying to get through and they became shapeshifters, you coming in with your idea or perception of that, and they took on different forms, the one word.'*

## UK Group 1

As outlined in the previous chapter, this group consisted of five participants who worked with the delivery organisation Community Resolve in some capacity. Some knew each other well while others had more recently joined the organisation. One worked from London while the other four were based in Bristol, primarily working from home. While the data collection session was lively and cheerful, producing a surprisingly coherent map of the collaborative structure that surrounded their delivery programme, there were nonetheless points of anxiety and withdrawal in the group. The central point of the five-minute field of tension related to a slow grinding to a halt as the issue of cross-system communications was raised:

Line	Unit	Time		
34	7	1.55	P3	<i>I remember you having quite a strong connection with Rg-,</i>
35				<i>like rather anxious</i>
36			P1	<i>Ok</i>
37			P2	<i>was it good communication ... or? what was that?</i>
38	8	2.07	P1	<i>that was um... that was about ... erm... that was about delivery</i>
39				<i>and money, really.</i>
40			P2	<i>and did the communication flow well, or... ?</i>
41			P1	<i>yeah, yeah ... no well as good as it could, I suppose [reluctant]</i>
42				<i>what can I say about that?</i>
43			P2	<i>I dont know</i>
44	9	2.24	P1	<i>[Sighing]</i>
45	10	2.28	P3	<i>In my case for example I can remember always being of course</i>
46				<i>difficulties but overall I would say that my communication with</i>
47				<i>say for example the guys at APT, and Le- as well who is the only</i>
48				<i>person I was in contact with at Ly-, was overall good.</i>
49			P1	<i>Good, good</i>
50			P2	<i>Good</i>
51	11	2.45	P1	<i>So we should have these as, we should have good</i>
52				<i>communication, just write.</i>

What initially jumps out here is the difficulty P1 is having in responding to a question about communication. It is clear from the transcript and her hesitation that the communication between various organisations was not good and yet it seems almost impossible for that to be said. This reluctance to acknowledge difficulties in the collaborative relationships is reinforced by the exaggerated response from P1 and P2 to P3's tension-breaking interjection. P3 has some marked differences to the other participants in this group. He is younger, male, Italian and worked more closely with P1 than any of the others on this piece of delivery work as administrator and quality control manager, which might account for his protective and diversionary 'stepping in' following the strained silence at 2:24. Echoing his final 'good', both P1 and P2 reiterate 'good' several times, with P1 emphasising in the last line of this extract: *'We should have good communication'* and then finishing with a clear order: *'— just write.'*

Does the 'should' in this sentence refer to an organisational imperative or internal, personal one? As seen in the previous chapter, participants positioned the organisation during the mapping task in the role of 'good communicator' across a wider dysfunctional collaborative system. Perhaps this hesitation is evidence of an internal contradiction in P1 who finds it too personally confronting to recognise where this was not the case. There is some evidence of this in her account collected a month later, as she was asked to reflect on what had emerged during the data collection session:

P1        *'We did put Community Resolve in the centre of it, and you know we quite clearly weren't the centre of it, umm, and so errr our ummm interest in the communication aspect and getting that flowing was perhaps more ... larger than it might ... out of proportion is what I'm trying to say, because we were sort of on the outside trying to make sense of it, it maybe that our our preoccupation with that was out of proportion.'*

Across the field of tension, and in fact across the two hours, two dominant voices, P1 and P2, are clearly directing the group's interactions. A difference between the two in both character and communication styles begins to emerge as the dynamic in the extract above is repeated across the session. P1 appears more hesitant and uncertain while P2 is confident and assertive. The two participants knew each other well and considered themselves to be

central figures within Community Resolve due to their length of association with the organisation. Nonetheless, there are several moments when they appear to be at odds, with the different communication styles in evidence leading to a sense of confrontation. It was also present in the feedback meeting they both attended a month later:

- P2 *We did the values exercise didn't we? and inevitably we're going to choose different things but that's not the point is it? it's the conversation around it and I felt there was no dissonance anywhere, you know we were kind of, connecting, respectful, and interested in each other's kind of values and so that felt umm creative. Yeah. In terms of our connection because of Community Resolve then I think our value base, our values were in tune, harmonious.*
- P1 *Thinking about the values bit [long pause/hesitation] I have a slightly different take. Ummmm ... I would say that there were different values in that room ... so two things really, first of all, you and I stayed in a room together, which I think also was probably not the best way of getting the broad values spoken into the room ...*
- P2 *ummm [sounding unhappy]*
- P1 *... umm because the two people that changed rooms were people who were slightly peripheral to the organisation in a way. So in fact if we were going to get a fuller discussion of values the thing would have been to separate those two, yes. So that's the first thing. And actually I think that was then reflected in the way the values task progressed, because there was more discussion to be had really about what things meant... there were definitely err errr pragmatic and practical values and things around particularly the word 'responsibility' and what that actually means. I think there was lot more discussion that could be had and ... I kind of felt... wasn't... there were differences there [petering out...]*
- P2 *I I I was quite fascinated, intrigued, by my response there that I was just being quite, you know [laugh, slightly embarrassed] 'I don't really care'. And and I can't quite remember, but I've got that feeling it was something to do with oh it's cold in that other room and we were, and I think you and me, P1, particularly were like, 'not going' - which is quite, you know, bloody hell...*
- P1 *It's interesting, isn't it and that's a whole power thing, a whole thing going on there.*

It is no coincidence that these are the two participants who are interacting as the group disrupts. After this data collection session, my co-observer drew attention to P2's 'odd'

behaviour during the values task. As they divided into two groups, a process which participants had to manage for themselves, P2 declared '*I'm not moving*' so making two of the newer Community Resolve associates (P4 and P5) change rooms and move to a space that was distinctly less physically comfortable. This was interesting at many levels, both in terms of how P2 asserted her power in the room and also in relation to her stated values during the values task of the importance of self reflection when working with others:

P2        '*So, my 2nd was consciousness. Why did I think that one? So you know, instead of just blundering through life, to do that with some kind of awareness, which you know kind of makes life sharper/sweeter, broader/wider, I don't know, more by truly living it. So if we bring a consciousness to what we do, what we see, what we hear, how we are, then it just changes things, you know.*'

Although the same differences in communication styles are in evidence in both the exchange extracts above – P2 more outspoken and direct, P1 more reticent – there are two different outcomes from the encounters. In the first, under pressure to perform and with others around them who they know less well, P2's attempts to get P1 to open up are rebuffed with silences and sighs. P3 steps in to rescue the situation and relieved, P1 and P2 step away from what has become a difficult moment and together shut the debate down, agreeing on '*good, good*' and '*just write*'. In the second extract, when they are alone and more relaxed, a similar dynamic arises but this time P1 works harder to express her different opinion – '*I think there was a lot more discussion to be had*' – in the face of P2's confident assertion that '*I think our values were tune, harmonious*'. In this second example P2 gives way, opening up to the criticism and using it as a tool for self reflection. These examples of different strategies employed to negotiate points of conflict demonstrate how they can lead to intriguingly different outcomes. In the first extract closing the discussion down meant that less information was included on the map than could have been added. The second extract explored a difference in viewpoint more fully, albeit reluctantly, and ended up with P1 and P2 reaching insightful reflections about how they behaved in the data collection space and how that impacted on the power dynamics in the group. It seemed that P1 could more easily accommodate and challenge P2's assertiveness when talking in pairs than in a larger group.

There were other examples of micro-power relations on display in this group. P1 and P3 were the two individuals in the group with the most overarching knowledge about the delivery programme and the collaborative structure around it. Despite her consistent positioning herself as 'chair' of whatever discussion she was in, P2 was in fact as tangential to the programme as P4 and P5 and yet occupied a very different space in the room. Moreover, although P5 knew less about the collaborative structure as a whole, her useful contributions across the field of tension and beyond – introducing new lines of thought for the group to consider - are essentially ignored by P1, P2 and P3. At Unit 12 she sensibly suggests the inclusion of a key for what was becoming an intricate map of the collaborative system and is knocked back:

Line	Unit	Time		
49	12	2.48	P5	<i>Are we going to write down somewhere what these are?</i>
50			P3	<i>No</i>
51			P1	<i>It's collapsed now [aside]</i>
52			P4	<i>Yeah</i>

At Unit 16 she tries again and is at first ignored before P2 grudgingly acknowledges that she has a point:

62	16	3.26	P5	<i>Can we write down somewhere what these</i>
63				<i>communications are? cos its... it is saying how were they</i>
64				<i>significant</i>
65			P4	<i>just put weird</i>
66			P2	<i>we're going to write it on it, yeah</i>

The key is finally added thanks to P5's persistence when she brings it up for the fourth time some 40 minutes into the task. Its addition was a pivotal contribution to the group's co-created map, making sense of all the contributions of the others, and yet was only achieved because of dogged determination. To persist in the face of being sidelined in discussions requires a certain level of confidence which points to an important factor in collaboration. It is not just the 'leaders' or loudest voices who make the biggest contributions: without multiple pieces of the puzzle the work is always less than the sum of its parts.

What is also striking is the difference in interaction between the group participants in the mapping task, which is based on transferring organisational history, memory and role onto paper, and in the task exploring individual values. In the values task there is no contested hierarchy in terms of organisational seniority and the interaction across the group is more even handed. All individuals listened to the ideas of others and built on them with a better balance of contribution to the discussion. As hoped, there were a good many conflict points across the values task, generating plenty of data relating to how moments of disagreement where negotiated as communication seized up. These included examples, as emerged in the visualization analysis, of how laughter was used at those points of conflict:

- P4      *Everything kind of really points towards being happy, really. Being kind to other people, regardless of whether that's a selfish act or... in a sense to make yourself feel happy. Fair enough.*  
 Long mystified pause. Nervous laughter
- P3      *Although, although* [Loud laughter as if tension broken]
- P5      *I was just going to say, there's no such eternal state as happiness. It's like a, you know, it's like a bit in time, and then like it's then you know where, it's shifting and it's fluid but it's not...*
- P3      *I agree, I per-, I don't think there is such a thing as 'happy'*

In this group 'power' emerged in multiple guises. It seemed that for this participant group a sense of entitlement was linked to longterm association with the organization, allowing some over others to speak up, disagree, express their views, enforce their needs and requirements, to push their point. Those who were more 'peripheral' felt less entitled and having their voices listened to required high levels of confidence to break into the discussion. The group also extensively discussed the idea and functioning of power across the collaborative system, in part because their efficiency in co-creating the map left time to reflect together on power dynamics. How they achieved that efficiency was a point of discussion for the observation team, who suggested that it could well be related to their primary skill set as facilitators of other people's ideas: *'perhaps they think of themselves as a cog in the wheel as opposed to being the wheel.'* Some of that sense of a facilitative organisational self and a belief in the equality of contribution and knowledge that a facilitative style builds on is evident in various conversations they had about power. They

returned to the theme again and again across the two hours, reflecting on many key points of relevance to sustainable collaborative working:

- P1 *Community Organisers, they were the people that the programme was centred around. Funny isn't it we've got them last on the list?*  
[General laughter]
- P4 *I was thinking that, we've gone top down rather than bottom up*
- P1 *Isn't that interesting, what does that tell us about power?*
- P2 *We've got communities as well, but at the bottom of the group*
- P3 *You know why?*
- P1 *Depends what collaboration means*
- P3 *And you know why they're there? - because we have basically listed them in a very specific order which is the order in which the money goes, from the top to the bottom*
- P5 *What I thought was interesting about that is, these are the most important people*
- P3 *Yea, community organisers*
- P5 *Because what they [indicating government on list] wanted to happen happens through these people [indicating community organisers], doesn't it? but then as you said all the money is here [top of list] and then here was a lot of hard work on these people [bottom of list], a lot of stress and and possibly no ongoing because there wasn't any future after...*

And later

- P1 *What we've got here is a big body but actually the collaboration was all about who was talking to who, and who got on with who, and who managed to get through the opaque quality of some others. So in fact we've got Rh- or we've got Le- and so on [referring to individuals on map] and I think that will make a difference because the actual particular connectors connect to a particular person in a particular way.*

And later again, when discussing blocks and barriers to collaboration:

- P5 *Another thing that was a barrier at times was technology*
- P3 *Uuuhhh [agreeing]*
- P1 *[loudly] Thank you*
- P3 *It's a good point, it's a very good point, that is very true, the whole programme was built around the you know assumption that people would be able to tap into all this new technology, no problem*
- P5 *And people had to leave the course that were really interested and wanted to be involved*
- P4 *On the other hand, the programme wouldn't have happened without it*



Reflections on the power of technology to facilitate and empower collaboration while still further disempowering those with the least power in the system draw attention to how reliant programme design and delivery can be on IT to achieve collaborative goals. As delivery programmes are increasingly designed and managed by IT natives or fluent IT users, others who have neither the hardware, the connectivity nor the IT skills to engage with such programmes to their full potential, or even at all, are sidelined despite their essential understandings of the environments the programmes are designed for.

### Summary

Some important observations in relation to collaborative working emerged from participants' discussions. In relation to the operation of power across the collaborative structure, they drew attention to social capital and access to government connections and contacts; to the significant role played by individuals in decision making roles; to the importance of personal agendas; to assumptions made around IT capacity and skills; to how programme resources were distributed; and to the tension between who the programme was aimed at (local communities reached through community organisers) and where the strategic power in the collaborative structure actually lay.

As they completed the various tasks set, a raft of other dynamics emerged through their conversations, including the impact on collaborative work of context and ecology (in this case, the division of participants into groups and the temperature of the rooms they worked in); our tendencies to develop 'rose-tinted memories' of our own behaviours unless constructively challenged; the challenge of accommodating different communication styles of group members; and the unspoken operation of micro-power relations, which illustrated how easy it is to drown out group participants without a way of working designed to counter that tendency. This all draws attention to the importance of reflexivity in collaborative work and takes us back to the question of what creates a more productive, inclusive creative space for a group working together, and especially one where there is an in-built hierarchy of experience and connection.

## UK Group 2

The five participants in this data collection group were drawn from across the spectrum of the UK collaborative system, engaging with the delivery work by Community Resolve via different roles in different organisations and at different levels of the collaboration 'hierarchy'. Some were managers, others frontline workers. In this group power dynamics were overtly played out although not much discussed. The five-minute stretch of talk that formed the field of tension opens with P6 describing a moment of collaborative disintegration, as relationships within a key organisation in the programme and between the staff, collaborative partners and 'outsiders' working with them imploded.

Line	Unit	Time		
40	8	2.17	P6	[speaking loudly over P8 & P10] <i>It's one of the things obviously</i>
41				<i>about that and our organisations and how we identify with them...</i>
42	9	2.23	P P8	[Side conversation to P10] <i>Do you want to put it up here?</i>
43			P10	<i>Don't want to put it up, suppose I could put it down there</i>
44			P8	<i>Down here, next to Le-</i>
45	10	2.26	P6	[continuing] <i>... is that at the end once we get to kind of here'ish,</i>
46				<i>the people that to an outsider they would think 'Rge-' were no</i>
47				<i>longer with Rge- [central organisation]</i>
48			All	[non-committal] <i>Hmmmm</i>
49			P6	<i>they were... individuals.</i>
50	11	2.44		[Extended silence – several seconds]
51	12	2.48	P8	<i>or right there maybe?</i> [Aside, quiet]
52	13	2.51	P6	<i>Could we have a big bomb?</i>
53			P9	[laughs]
54			P8	<i>big bomb?</i>
55			P9	[chuckling]
56			P6	<i>I'm talking not literally</i>
57			P8	<i>oh for goodness sake</i> [frustrated]
58			P10	<i>what, a picture of a bomb?</i>
59			P9	<i>with the psshhh</i> [making sound of a fuse]
60			P6	<i>for action camp number 2</i>
61			P8&P9	[laughing]
62	14	3.05	P7	[quiet] <i>Can I have a paper?</i>

This fractious group used a range of different strategies to arrive at and negotiate their way out of the explosive point of conflict at the heart of the field of tension. The domination of the interaction by a single insistent voice (P6) is mirrored by rising levels of irritation among other participants. They employ a variety of strategies to break the dynamic, from attempting to change the direction of discussion (Unit 4, P8, 1.02) and side conversations (Unit 9, P8 and P10, 2.26) to refusing to engage with what has been said (Unit 12, P8, 2.28). Steadily ignoring all attempts to distract her, P6 increases the pressure on the group by suggesting the addition of a 'bomb' to the collaborative map. This provokes a flurry of reaction and response encompassing frustration (P8), nervous laughter (P9), quiet, head-down concentration on the task (P7) and open irritation (P10).

As with UK Group 1, it is instructive to observe who took the lead in the group interactions in general, and in particular across the field of tension. Threaded through the five minutes are the voices of P6, intent on raising the difficult organisational and relational dynamics at the heart of the collaborative structure, and P8 who seems quietly keen to avoid discussion of this or any other confrontation. These two are most directly in conflict across the field of tension, notably before, during and after the explosion at 2:51. P8 expresses her frustration most clearly – '*oh for goodness sake*' – and then goes quiet before bringing the group back to the bomb idea herself at Unit 19, 3.3 minutes in:

71	19	3.33	P8	<i>there you go, there's your bomb</i>
72			P6	<i>thank you, I didn't mean that sort of bomb actually, I meant</i>
73				<i>more ripples</i>
74			P8	<i>well you can do your own thing</i>
75			P9	<i>[laughs] that's the bomb I envisioned, I envisioned that bomb</i>

In what appears to be an attempt to re-establish relationship these two then recall a past private conversation, vividly illustrating their different communication styles and values:

76		P8	<i>you wanted to call your business something violent</i>
77		P6	<i>Fashion and Firebombs</i>
78		P8	<i>yea, yea</i>
79		P6	<i>and it became Style &amp; Sedition</i>
80		P8	<i>good</i>
81		P6	<i>after P8's intervention</i>
82		P8	<i>Quaker feedback</i>
83			<i>General laughter</i>

This group consisted of some senior figures in the national collaborative programme, from a lead civil servant (P8) to the last of several programme managers (P6). As the competition in the research space heats up, P6 and P8 spar with the head of training (P10) through the mapping task. Participants P7 and P9 seem to take a back seat. This suggests that as with the previous UK group some form of perceived seniority (here more clearly derived from a hierarchical ranking in the overall collaborative structure) gives permission to take a more overtly confrontational position in a group dynamic. What is intriguing, however, is that as the group reflected on connections and communication channels across the collaborative system it became clear just how well P9 was plugged in - far better connected than P8 as she acknowledged at the time:

P8      *P9's got like lines everywhere [laughing], like across the timespan as well, [whereas] the only ones, the only lines that it occurred to me to put from the government is the kind of formal reporting line between us and the programme managers.*

Even so, P9 seemed to find it hard to contribute to the mapping task, resorting to jokes and laughter more than actual factual or reflective contributions. The impression on listening to the recording and reading the transcript of the whole task is that he feels less entitled to contribute than others in the session – but why would this be? He was deep in the community organiser programme from the very start, trained as an organiser in the first cohort, worked as an organiser in London and then latterly became part of the training team for new recruits. He therefore held valuable knowledge about how the collaborative structure functioned at multiple levels and was deeply committed to the programme:

P9      *Unlike for you, that is such a huge, life-changing set of years for me, you know the door opened up for me to actually speak and become - , because I had to be more political or provoke people to be more political, I had to walk the talk and I became - I opened myself out and I brought the politics out, all this really changed how much I speak out because I was supporting people to speak out.*

Despite his profound knowledge of the delivery programme and its impact, P9's tentative contributions consist mainly of his continuous nervous laughter as illustrated in the

visualization of the field of tension and notable examples of self deprecation where he refers to himself in the 3rd person: *'K's just a social butterfly, K just likes to be connected and talking'*. Together, an impression of him being in some way an outsider in the data collection group emerges. (Question: does my use of the word 'outsider' and my sense of P9 as an outsider relate to how the word is used so casually by the programme manager in the field of tension?) It is true that P9 stood out in what was a relatively homogenous participant group. He was male, black, American and gay alongside four female, white, British heterosexuals, although these aspects of his identity were casually referred to in other parts of the data collection session without giving any sense of separation. Rather, it seems that he considered his knowledge and experience 'less than' that of others in the group who he perceives as higher up the hierarchy tree. Perhaps this perception is rooted in his experience of attitudes in the management team, unconscious or otherwise, and in the competitive nature of the collaboration. It was P9, after all, who chose security as one of his core values because of his need to feel safe.

In the data collection session itself, a dynamic of competitively jostling against each other was amply demonstrated in the room through the nature of the interactions (in-jokes, digs, put-downs) and in the mass of words the group generated. The participants themselves reflected on this sense of competition as they considered the map of the collaboration that they had created:

P7     *I suppose for me when I look at the map and what I feel is like, it looks like a nucleus, like there's a concentrated bit, and as you go out to the edging bits it's looser and so in terms of, so I wonder if the power is around there, where that concentrated bit is. Um. It seems like it can breathe at the edges and there's not much space for breathing in there.*

P8     *yea almost in that bit, it's almost mo-, felt more competitive in a way*

P7     *yeah*

P8     *and that there were more organisations kind of jostling against each other*

The long, long transcript for this group's mapping task confirms that there was 'not much space for breathing' even during the data collection session itself. There was evidence of struggle and competition throughout the session, as my co-observer noted immediately after the meeting:

CO      *What strikes me is that it was really hard to get on the map, all five people in the room were ALL struggling with finding space to go on the map, to put the network partners in. They were all trying to stand in front of the paper unnecessarily because everybody got tired very soon.*

In the values task that followed the mapping P6 and P8 end up working together in a pair and perhaps not by coincidence. During the process of splitting into self-selected groups the other three participants quickly elected to leave the main room and work together in a side room before any real discussion was had. The differences in P6 and P8's value sets glimpsed at in the mapping task became more evident during the process of distilling their eight priority values down to four. It quickly emerged that out of the original list of 100 values they had picked almost none that were the same.

P6            *In terms of what I value as an outcome, I'm quite focussed on doing.*

P8            *I'm more focussed on writing things for other people to do, I like process*

P6            *I like process too but I do like getting my hands dirty; but then there are all sorts of action aren't there, including inaction?*

P8            *indeed, corporate intransigence, it's a very powerful form of action. I also had attention, clarity, expertise, recognition, efficiency – I tried not to think about it too much, it's probably some horrible insight into my [pause] ... cleverness, success, dedication, appreciation*

P6            *I can honestly say we barely overlapped.*

P8            *hmmm that's interesting.*

As a way of achieving the task they had been set P8 opted for horse-trading – one of yours for one of mine – while P6 proposed breaking the rules to find something that worked better as a fit between them. Of the two, P6's suggestion is the more creative as it builds on each other's ideas in some way but it also required both of them to move away from playing it safe:

P8            *Integrity was my number one. What was your Number 1?*

P6            *Consciousness –*

P7            *Let's have that then, I think we should have our Number 1's...*

P6            *We could be brave and choose one neither of us chose*

P8            *Are we allowed to do that though? It could be a bit stressful, if we'd done it wrong...*

My co-observer stayed with the pair and later noted that *'they really didn't want to work together, totally disagreeing but just behaving such in a nice way, as if they couldn't really confront each other with their strong feelings'*. As I returned to the main research space with the other small group, P6 suggested that P8 was 'hung up' (her phrase) on the word integrity.

One of the most notable features of the map produced by this group was the overwhelming dominance of individual names and roles as opposed to organisational structures and linkages. It was the focus of much reflection in the observer group as we looked at the map they created:

R            *There was a big spread in roles there. I wonder if it's because these entities were too large to claim to 'be' – in a small housing organisation you can claim to 'be' an organisation, but when you're a civil servant in a government programme, you can't always claim to 'be' the government. So I'm wondering if there's something interesting going on here about when you scale up these cross-sector collaborations, the role of the individual becomes more prominent in a way, because you can't be everything.*

Our observation reflections were mirrored to some degree in the final reflections by participants at the end of the data collection session, with one noting *'the difference between organisational connections and individual connections - how people in the different organisations had relationships with each other and how they have become more and more personal over time'*. Perhaps this contributed in some way to why almost all their discussions about power related to the personal:

P6            *I guess there's power that's structural from programme responsibilities, and, I would have had oodles and oodles of that, and indeed did. I myself and N-made all the decisions about the programme, about everything, who we employed, who we worked with, who helped us with the training from the organisers present, I mean P8 was behind all that but because of the, because they were a great client and devolved a lot of the decision making unless it was something reputational involving government, then we did make all the decisions. And then there's felt power, and how powerful one*

*feels, and of course I probably never felt more disempowered in my life for the whole 3 or 4 years. But in fact I did have a lot of power.*

## Summary

During the final round of reflections, P7 commented on how a different approach to the mapping task could have created alternative outputs: *'It's interesting, there's sort of like a time map, and a felt map, isn't there? ... there's a sort of linear, factual [sense to the map] and then it would be a completely different map if we were mapping the felt sense of things.'* This reference to the different lenses through which it was possible to understand the collaboration dynamics, and the relationships within it, highlights how where collaborative groups put their attention is where the energy goes.

In this group, the different layers of analysis each contribute a lens through which to understand the group interaction – a chaotic, personalised and disordered co-created map, a background of nervous laughter, an energy line full of spikes. When combined, they build a picture of dysfunction and lack of safety in this group that the transcript alone would not have given, suggesting as it does light-hearted banter threaded through with laughter. Here then is some evidence of the value of combining nonverbal analysis with verbal content in qualitative analysis.

There are multiple tussles in evidence both in the research space and in the map created by participants in this group. Considerable weight seems to be given to seniority, represented here through rank (ie collaborative hierarchy based on budget allocation and/or decision-making responsibilities) and age, with clear evidence of how personality types can impact on a group dynamic. Participants in this group were drawn from multiple different organisations, and the added complications they faced of combining those different organisational cultures are on display here through the different values sets that emerged. Those diverse values impacted both on how easily the group worked together (or not) and on strategies used to engage with conflict in the various participant interactions.



## NL Group 1

This group was made up of associates of Dutch delivery organisation Inkr8 who fulfilled a variety of roles from lead to trainer to the chair of the board. The group also included one woman who had just met the organisation but who they invited anyway (P16) and a late arrival (P15), a Moroccan-born man who had been trained by Inkr8. While there was no clear point of conflict, there were some notable power plays evident across the two hours. Two of these are present in the field of tension used to generate the energy line visualization, including a noisy interaction with the late arrival and a much quieter exchange over language use. In the extract below, the five participants are just completing the co-creation of the map when P15 finally arrives. They then settle down to explain to him what they had been doing in the mapping task. They had planned to do this in English for my benefit, but this function for the explanation was lost in the furore accompanying P15's arrival:

Line	Unit	Time		
19			P14	<i>Hi, M- [introducing self]</i>
20			P16	<i>R-, nice to meet you. [introducing self]</i>
21	7	1.37	R	<i>Have a chair</i>
22			P15	<i>Sorry for being late</i>
23			P13	<i>But now you're here!</i>
24	8	1.48	P12	<i>We just finished an exercise which I will explain in English</i>
25			R	<i>Is English OK?</i>
26			P15	<i>No problem!</i>
27	9	1.56	P12	<i>[In English] So we will explain in English what we have done.</i>
28				<i>OK, the exercise was to draw all the organisations in Almere,</i>
29				<i>one of our new projects</i>
30				<i>who are involved in the Inkr8 process. Shall I go on? [to R]</i>
31			R	<i>Please</i>
32			P12	<i>There's one woningcorporatie,</i>
33	10	2.22	P13	<i>[In Dutch] I suggest we do it in Dutch</i>
34			P14	<i>[in English] Housing corporation</i>
35	11	2.25	P12	<i>[in English] housing corporation [moves into Dutch] and they</i>
36				<i>introduced us. They work together with another housing</i>
37				<i>cooperation and with the municipality. The three of them</i>
38				<i>gave us a follow-up assignment to get people in Almere</i>
39				<i>Haven involved. The inhabitants and other organisations,</i>
40				<i>such as residents' committees, a 'white' club, the</i>
41				<i>neighbourhood worker from Amsterdam.</i>

As discussed in the previous chapter, the joint mapping exercise turned out to be less co-creation and more the unfolding of a story as told by the two lead voices in the group, Inkr8 founders P11 and P12. As a result, there were limited examples in this group's data of where conflicting ideas and suggestions were offered. Instead, they explained how their map was based on delivery in an Amsterdam satellite town to help residents and neighbours living in social housing get to know each other and so reduce tensions. As their explanation highlighted a number of complications that emerge in trying to put this work together at grassroots levels in underfunded communities, it is included below. It also highlights the importance that Inkr8 also give to the role, knowledge and function of local residents as opposed to 'professionals', a theme that also emerged in Round 1 of the UK data groups:

- P11 There's one housing cooperation and they introduced us. They work together with another housing cooperation and with the municipality. The three of them gave us a follow up assignment to get people in Almere Haven involved. The inhabitants and other organisations, such as residents' committees, a 'white' club, the neighbourhood worker from Amsterdam. ... The welfare organisations say they are interested but they don't participate. We had lots of contact with the mosque, but in the end they don't participate. We have met with a lot of people in schools, who also say they are interested but have no time to invest in training. We have given presentations to young people, who now want to participate in the third phase of this project.*
- P12 Neighbourhood inhabitants are the real key factor. They are – and that is good, we have been working on this there for two years, and now there is a group of inhabitants who are enthusiastic and want to participate. They want to do the 'train the trainer' program. And this is typical for what happens. We recently composed a letter for B- [a commissioner of the work] to send to these people, telling them that the decision to let us train them has not yet been taken!*
- P11 He was really enthusiastic*
- P12 'That's good, I'll do it immediately.' We were so angry that all these people are eager to participate and now we've been waiting months for a green light. And we couldn't tell them a thing. So now you do it, is what we thought. And so he did. And that's so typical for the relationship: we are constantly directing them.'*

As P11 and P12 recounted their experiences of this specific piece of delivery work, the other three participants were left with little to contribute other than questions such as: *‘What is the key factor in getting people and organisations to participate?’* (P13). This formula was interrupted only as the sixth group participant arrived towards the end of the mapping task and completely up-ended the group dynamic. On his imminent arrival following a phone call, the group appeared to spontaneously organise itself according to his perceived needs, pausing everything for 6 minutes or more and leaving the building to go and find him. The fact that this was a research session seemed to have been completely forgotten. Once he finally appeared the group resettled and continued, recapping everything on the map for the sake of the new arrival. During this recap P13, the oldest participant in the room and most ‘senior’ of the group suggested a change in language use directly in contradiction to the researcher request at 2.22. P14, the youngest participant in the room, quietly rebuffs her but nonetheless P12 switches from English to Dutch as directed by P13. Why? Why the request, and why the switch?

At some level, this incident could be seen as related to the noisier power dynamic which surrounded the late arrival. It was striking how there was an illusion of dependence on this particular participant – a Moroccan man in his 30s who had been trained by the organisation as a community facilitator and who my Dutch co-observer later referred to (disparagingly?) as the ‘hugging’ Moroccan. (He was translating a Dutch phrase used to refer to an ‘acceptable’ someone from an outsider group.) Inkr8’s passionate commitment to accessing and utilising the skills and strengths of marginalised groups in Dutch society meant that they were keen to provide a ‘diverse’ group for this data collection session. P15’s Moroccan heritage contributed to that aim, fulfilling some of how the organisation wanted to see themselves, and to be seen. This could be one reason why so much importance was placed on his presence and why they allowed him to bend the norms of social interaction.

Punctuality is prized in the Netherlands and is a feature of meetings and organisations, a symbol of reliability. In this data collection session, however, it seemed that standard ways of interacting were being stretched to accommodate difference as Inkr8 worked to integrate two sets of cultural norms. P13 in particular, the chair of Inkr8’s board, was keen to put P15 at ease although in her own professional life such lateness would not have been acceptable. This leeway was particularly clear during the final stages of the values task as the whole

group were working together to agree four values. This task had proved more challenging for the participants than I had expected and P15 in particular had found the process of paring down values frustrating: *'It seems that the deeper you look, going from one word to the next, the more they seem to have the same meaning.'* As they came back together from working in small groups, it was clear that he was at odds with others about the values task:

- P15    *They are all the same [Laughing] - openness, attention, being noticed, respect...*  
P11    *There are similarities but they are not the same*  
P12    *No they are not the same*  
P15    *They are the same [as if joking]*

In analysing the transcripts of the values task discussions it appeared that the notion of unpicking the meaning of the value words at an individual level had not crossed the minds of most participants in this group. In some way, P15's irritation with the process seemed to surface a lack of understanding about the task's purpose in the group as a whole. The value 'respect' (one of their final four) was discussed by all group participants in small groups as well as together and yet at no point did anyone attempt to describe what 'respect' meant to them personally, even though it was demonstrably clear that they had different understandings of the word. The total discussion of 'respect' was thin, establishing that: *'Respect is what you show and do on a daily basis'* (P11); *'should be mutual'* (P11); *'includes connection'* (P16); *'there's no respect without equality'* (P13) and *'you need to earn respect'* (P15) – *'or not'* (P12). This is intriguing. Was this down to a lack of awareness that others hold very different worldviews, an assumption of universality in relation to words and vocabulary? Or perhaps a reluctance to engage in detailed debate because of a lack of interest, or an anxiety about whether it would be possible to reach a consensual position if all views were freely aired?

In a later discussion with P11 she suggested that P15's irritable response to the task had a different root. An exercise such as the values task requires a nuanced understanding of the language, and is not easy for a native language speaker, let alone someone speaking in a second or third language; and in addition, it is a task that will always be easier for people who are interested in using language in that way. Many people are not, and it could have the effect of making them feel alienated and belittled. These insightful reflections are useful

to bear in mind for anyone shaping task-based research groups in the future – or indeed doing any form of word-based qualitative research.

In the final stages of the values task, P15 was encouraged by P12 to take a pen and to *'draw lines connecting words that could be a pair'* on the flip chart. Once he had the pen in hand P15 dominated the proceedings, again throwing the task off course just as his late arrival had done with the previous mapping task and again supported in this by P13. Given my lack of Dutch, I am reliant here on observations from my native Dutch co-observer who felt strongly that at this point the group was *'allowing'* P15's transgressive behaviour without really supporting him: *'A lot of things stayed under the table especially around the idea of 'respect' – they didn't challenge him, as in 'we have a different way of thinking about it''*. P15's awareness of this double-edged dynamic seems apparent in the extract below with his mocking *'We're going to vote... that's democracy, isn't it?'*.

P15        *We're going to vote. Respect in first place?*  
              [laughing] *Two people. That's democracy isn't it?*

Uneasy silence. Short laugh.

P12        *I don't understand what you want to achieve with voting?*  
              *That doesn't make sense* [laughing]  
P11        *It's a problem. Do you want to do it differently?*  
P15        *It's not important*  
P12        *It is important, P15.*  
P15        *Next point* [impatient]  
P13        *Yes, next point...*  
P15        [Annoyed] *Attention/appreciation – who thinks this is important?*  
P12        *Anyone else? Next item* [laughing]  
P15        *Compassion? Who votes for compassion?*

Understanding this complex set of interactions is perhaps helped by an awareness of social undercurrents in wider Dutch society at the time. Around the point of this data collection session, January 2016, longstanding under-the-surface tensions in the Netherlands in relation to multicultural dynamics were being reluctantly forced into the limelight with the arrival of Syrian refugees in significant numbers and the accompanying rise of anti-Muslim far right rhetoric. No-one in the data collection session would have been unaware of these

developments. But for me, there is something else going on here too. Inkr8 aims to work with those who they felt were the least empowered in Dutch society, which meant that much of their work was focussed on young people and immigrant populations with least access to resources and opportunities.

P12 *'Why be in a university and teach thousands of kids who have all the opportunities to resolve conflict? We hope these tools will let people with the stigma show themselves that they can change the world.'*

In a subsequent feedback session, Inkr8's two leads both talked about how the meeting had led to other things as *'the bigger Inkr8 became visible'* and about the role it had played in bringing people together. When I asked why they felt the research meeting in particular had had that impact, P11 explained that it was *'important enough for people like P13 to come - because P13 doesn't come to those meetings, she has lots of other work, but it looked for her important enough to be there, and it looked important enough to P15 - just talking to us is not special anymore'*. In addition, both talked about the value of meeting in a space where someone else set the agenda and where they were challenged to discuss an important subject on an equal basis: *'Normally we know more and say less so you don't get a really equal connection then'* (P12). They also reflected on the interaction between P13 and P15:

P11 *'For P15 to be part of it was important, the start of new things. Five have met again, P15 got his recognition in that meeting because he was visibly part of the people, he was invited, it gave him very good contact with P13. We had an intuition it would work... he is very intrigued by P13 and P13 is intrigued by him.'*

This answered a question I was left with at the end of the data collection session, when P13 and P15 had looked through photographs of P15's family together. It had surprised me and I wondered what it represented. Did they know each other well, or was this a surface engagement with another's reality to build a sense of relational closeness? I had already noted the lack of boundaries in the group, and their approach to the research session suggested that Inkr8 members were not especially reflexive, more focussed on sharing tools than developing an awareness of their own relationships to conflict. I wondered if maybe having tight 'surface-level' relationships allowed participants to ignore threatening undercurrents of difference that ran below, out of sight. Perhaps allowing certain behaviours and assuming universality (as for example in the values task) was a route to consensus

without engaging with the potential disruption of disagreement. Conflict was avoided, though at a cost of not reaching a deeper understanding of all perspectives in the room.

This led me to reflect on another conundrum. Which was more respectful in relation to working with individuals from a minority background with a different value set - to hold back from challenging P15 from a position of real or perceived privileged power (that is, from a majority group position) so as to avoid further undermining someone with little access to power; or to treat everyone in the space equally, no matter what their background or cultural frames, to avoid overprotecting or thinking for others?

### Summary

This data collection session was intriguing in the group's disregard for conventional boundaries – a lack of attention to the research process, a willingness to accept transgressive behaviours from one of its participants – alongside a reluctance to overtly engage with difference and disagreement. Power dynamics in the group were also interesting, appearing to link to seniority (as in age) and leadership style (as in domination of the space by founders P11 and 12) as well as indicating a significant but unacknowledged majority/minority dynamic underpinning both group process and participant discussions. One puzzling aspect to this group was a seeming lack of self-reflection at both an individual and an organisational level. This included understanding how their behaviours impact on wider systems that they are involved in (such as the research process) and was indicated also through their forgetfulness to include themselves on their own map of the collaborative system that surrounds their work.

### NL Group 2

The second Dutch participant group was drawn from the wider collaborative system surrounding Inkr8's work and consisted of five individuals, one of whom left after the first mapping task was completed. The group had a different feeling to the previous Dutch group – more 'professional' and detached, and less inclusive despite their intentions to the contrary. At the heart of the 5-minute field of tension visualized in the previous chapter was an exchange that in itself seems almost negligible and yet which contained a number of

different elements that occurred elsewhere across the data collection session. As with the previous Dutch group, the exchange appeared to have links to a key social discourse in the Netherlands at the time: the challenge to (traditional white) Dutch culture presented by the arrival and integration of large numbers of refugees. This was leading to greatly heightened tensions and anxieties and resulted in a spike in popularity for the Far Right under its leader Geert Wilders. As refugees started to arrive in considerable numbers, the demographic shifts presented challenges for both majority white Dutch nationals and for members of minority groups already settled in the Netherlands.

It was watching this group that I noticed just how little was brought to the table that sparked real animated discussion or which could be contentious. I began to wonder if this might be one strategy the Dutch use to manage conflict at work – they don't say anything that might cause trouble in the room but sit on it and then operate from a polite but silenced passive aggressive stance.

Line	Unit	Time	
17	4		P19 <i>Some of the neighbourhood inhabitants don't have children at our</i>
18			<i>school. They are just inhabitants in the neighbourhood. But they</i>
19			<i>have done the training and are affected by the spreading of ideas and</i>
20			<i>networks. The school board doesn't have anything to do with it, in the</i>
21			<i>way that you do. But teachers and parents – in that sense the school</i>
22			<i>does. As an organisation we have contacts and discussions...</i>
23	5	2.33	P21 <i>Did you know P17?</i>
24			P17 <i>From the Centre, yes</i>
25			P19 <i>Yes, yes, no, no</i>
26			P17 <i>Your face is known to me</i>
27			P19 <i>Hmm? [as if not understanding P17's accent]</i>
28			P17 <i>Your face is known to me [laughing to cover embarrassment, P18 joins]</i>
29			P19 <i>Yes but that could also be from a party... no</i>
30			P21 <i>You do know her?</i>
31			P18 <i>Yes</i>
32	6	3.00	P21 <i>Shall I draw a link?</i>
33			P18 <i>Yes, do.</i>

Although this is the most low-key of the four data collection groups this brief moment of tension provides a glimpse into how power operates in ostensibly friendly professional environments, and specifically in relation to the interaction between majority and minority



populations. A tiny moment in two hours of data but telling, an example of the type of micro-aggression routinely experienced by marginalised groups. P17, a young bright Moroccan woman who speaks Dutch fluently albeit with a heavy accent is talking directly to P19, a much older retired white headteacher who was working until very recently as a key community figure in an area of the city on the frontline of changing demographics. The older woman had her arms crossed and sat well back in her chair; the younger woman leant forward to connect, offering *'your face is known to me'* with a smile. Despite sitting less than a metre apart in a quiet room, the headteacher failed to understand what was said to her or even apparently to notice P17 as she speaks. She was flustered by the question *'Do you know P17?'*, floundering from yes to no. Why would that be?

Later in the data collection session, there is a repeat of this dynamic, this time more forceful as the uneasy interaction between the two women becomes more overtly confrontational, with a sense of both being reluctant to step back for the sake of harmony. All of this, however, in a very subdued, polite way. Discussing her values in a small group with P20, P17 expressed why *'freedom'* was her Number 1 priority: *'Yes freedom has priority over the other values. I have always fought for freedom. In another society, in Morocco, where women have a lower position than men. Up until now I have always had to fight for my rights. That's why it is so important for me.'* When they joined the other small group, an interesting interaction unfolded between P17 and P19:

- P18      *Freedom – what does that mean for you?*  
P17      *Everything*  
            [Laughter]  
P17      *No, really, everything.*  
P18      *Because you know how it is if you don't have freedom?*  
P17      *That's right.*  
P19      *What I think of the value freedom is that it could be interpreted as: you can do anything you want.*  
P17      *No, not for me. I know some people think that, but for me freedom is more like responsibility. Freedom but also responsibility.*  
P18      *Ah, making your own decisions, yes.*  
P20      *The freedom to be yourself.*  
P17      *Yes – in work, contacts, everything, everything.*  
P19      *It's a good thing this is being recorded. Otherwise it could be described in a different way tomorrow.*

What is P19 getting at with this last statement? She returns to this anxiety again and again over the next chunk of discussion:

- P18 *So freedom should be high on the list...*  
P19 *But then as we defined, not the 'freedom' of a screaming child...*  
[impatient voices: yes yes yes]  
P20 *Yes, in that context I choose freedom.*  
P18 *P19?*  
P19 *Yes I find that a bit difficult. What I feel is – the way you put it, I can agree - but over time I have learned that some things take on a life of their own. If you cannot make sure all the nuances will be heard, what will become of this if none of us are there to explain. Some things are impossible without freedom, the freedom to do this or that. On the other hand you can... must... [can't seem to find the words]*

And later again

- P19 *Returning to the subject of freedom, as long as it is not seen as: everyone can do as he pleases. [The others laugh]*

In discussions with my co-observer directly after this meeting, he reflected on P19's role as headmistress with a catchment area of rapid demographic change moving from exclusively white Dutch residents to a mix of different ethnicities. In her role of bridging and representing the views of very different parent groups and with a white Dutch teaching workforce, how overt could she be about her own feelings or those of different constituent groups? He wondered whether she was '*carrying Geert Wilder attitudes*' that were '*pretty much those of some of her parent groups*' as she met and talked to local people day in and day out, or were perhaps her own. Listening to the Dutch used, he experienced P19's 'attack' (his word) on P17 as asking: '*If everybody is free, maybe that is the opposite of the Dutch values, so how free can you be?*'.

There was another interesting dynamic in this group, which was how the 'professionals' (P18, P19, P20 and P21) positioned themselves in relation to P17 – and she to them. The group of professionals felt very familiar with this type of multi-agency meeting and were relaxed, albeit careful and somewhat guarded. Nonetheless, there was a sense of some things being able to be said and others not. The self-management of the group was led by

P21 and backed up by P18, roles that are clearly seen in the transcript of the field of tension extract above. Following the exchange between P17 and P19, for example, P21 and P18 decide between themselves to link the two women on the map without waiting for their agreement. Observing the meeting, I wondered what the professionals in the room saw in P17 and how it differed to my first impression: of a bright spark, highly intelligent and motivated. P19's insistence that *"freedom' cannot be the freedom of a screaming child"* seems a strangely infantilising response to someone else's core values.

Although P17 was invited into the mapping process at various points by the others and her priority value of 'freedom' was included in their final four (although it is not clear why), it felt like none of the professionals truly acknowledged what she could contribute to their understanding of Inkr8's work and its impact. Reflecting later on the meeting, both I and my co-observer were left with the distinct impression that P17 wasn't really seen in the space – or put another way, was only allowed to be a certain person in that space. We discussed how one mechanism for this positioning was her lack of English skills, seen as a measure of education in the Netherlands. What was interesting was that P19 (a retired headteacher) also had limited English skills but she did not acknowledge this in the room and nor did anyone else. My notes after the meeting focus on this question:

*'Watching the dynamics between everyone and P17... what's that about? Clear divide between white Dutch / Moroccan (P17); professionals / resident rep (P17). Manifested through body language - P19 arms crossed, P20 / P17 not looking at each other; overly 'kind' efforts from P21 to involve P17. There is a patronising echo in this group, professionals seeing P17 as 'less' than them in some way; less access to decision making, less familiarity with meetings of this type, less education, social capital, privilege.'*

What was notable with this group was how Inkr8 was positioned at the heart of the collaborative map, with the professionals in the room including themselves as contacts and connections but peripheral to the activities of the organisation and the growing networks created at a neighbourhood level:

P19     *Do we put the neighbourhood in the middle, or the inhabitants...?*  
P18     *Or Inkr8? But I think it's good to put the neighbourhood in the centre of things. [Laughter]*

P20 *Yes that seems logical. Is that practical?*

P21 *Yes, Inkr8 in the middle with a circle around them because they are active in the heart of the neighbourhood. And surrounding that, another circle representing the neighbourhood. And in that one we put our names, nearby or further away.*

There was no sense here of competition between themselves or between their roles and the activities of Inkr8 – a distinct difference to the dynamics in UK Group 2. However, P18, the participant in the room with the most influence, did reflect on how the relationship between commissioners and small delivery organisations becomes more complicated when formal structures enter the picture, and especially in relation to demonstrating impact:

P18 *I have less difficulty in the client role with other partners. I think because it is easier to define the results. I find myself thinking: so many people have taken part in the training sessions, and I would expect there to be a sort of energy in the neighbourhood, but I don't really see that...*

## Summary

Interestingly, this group did not overtly mention power even once although they received the same briefing sheets as other participant groups. Even so, there were observable micro-power relations in the group related to gender differences, professional status and privilege granted through ethnic background. While on the surface the group worked well together, I was left as the researcher with a sense of distinctly thin connection between individuals and across the collaborative network. This impression is supported both by the flatness of the energy line visualization, by the shortness of the transcripts relating to all aspects of this group's interaction and by the unconflicting nature of the discussions themselves – with the sole exception of the discussion of 'freedom'. What jumps out is a sense of self censorship – what is being said into the space and what is not. This is intriguing, especially as the meeting concluded with their acknowledgement of the value of reflecting together.

## Conclusion

By re-engaging with the conflict points illustrated through the visualization analysis in Chapter 5, it has been possible in this chapter to unearth a deeper level of understanding of the in-the-room and beneath-the-surface dynamics of each of the four data collection groups. By further exploring the central conflict point in each group through a textual analysis, it was possible to identify specific power relationships and themes that were running through the groups, and to illustrate them by drawing on the wider data pool of observation and other participant tasks. Among the most striking of these were the multiple examples of how privilege and positioning operated in each of the groups, highlighting micro-politics in and across the two collaborative systems with a resonance with wider social dynamics at play in both countries. These included an unexpected insight into majority / minority relations in the groups that was surprisingly present in the data.

In the following chapter, Chapter 7, I return to the themes that emerge most clearly across both findings chapters and reflect on their possible meaning in relation to sustainable collaborative working.

## Chapter 7:

### The value of a 'space between' focus

In the early chapters of this iterative PhD I set out a number of key themes relating to the challenges of working in multi--sectoral and cross-cultural collaborations. This is a vast area of study, but decades of work at the sharp end of service delivery in complex social environments had focused my mind on particular aspects of collaborative working that I wanted to explore. These included: how the formal structure of a collaboration impacts on the relational interactions of collaborative partners; how power dynamics operate across the multiple layers of a collaborative system and how these relate to the micro-politics of delivery; how conflict was understood and addressed across a collaborative system; and what contributes to the creativity and sustainability of collaborations operating in fluid and unpredictable complex social environments.

In this chapter, I reflect on the patterns and issues that emerged through this research that are of relevance to the themes above and to my original research question: '*How might a focus on 'the space between' contribute to a theoretical and applied understanding of multi-sectoral collaboration dynamics?*'. I briefly reflect on these findings through the prism of earlier studies, specifically exploring intra-collaborative dynamics and how these relate to conflict engagement and sustainability. I then focus on what I consider to be the major contribution of the thesis: the impact of its underlying complexity-informed theoretical paradigm on the research design and its methods and methodologies, from engaging with an open-ended emergent approach to all stages of the process to the conceptualisation of researching in 'the space between'. The chapter concludes with review of the strengths and weaknesses of the research design as a whole, followed by reflections on how future research might build on this study.

#### The impact of structure on relational dynamics

In this thesis, I have been reflecting on the challenges of delivering key infrastructure projects through multi-sectoral and cross-cultural collaborations, from housing and health

to youth services and community development. Over the last few decades, a consistent move towards fragmented governance has led to the rise and rise of such collaboratives, often working within complex social environments to deliver services that would previously have been the responsibility of an overarching body such as a local authority (cf Armistead et al. 2007; Taylor 2007; Bolt & van Kempen 2011; Teernstra & Pinskieter 2014). Whereas earlier leadership and managerial structures and styles responsible for delivering such work would have automatically been hierarchical and top-down, the aspiration for collaborative delivery suggests a shift towards acknowledging and utilising collective knowledge and experience. However, as numerous studies show there remains a considerable gap between collaborative rhetoric and its reality (Amin & Thrift 2002; Healey 2007).

Initial discussions between key partners are the starting point for any collaborative venture, and as evidenced by the UK case study in this research, those discussions often start where the money is. Unsurprisingly, the development of a formal protocol setting out parameters for how partner organisations will work together - management structures, decision making processes, resourcing, reporting arrangements and so forth - generally takes place in such top-down collaborations before commissioning bodies engage with the wider collaborative network (Healey 2007; Crosby & Bryson 2010). These important processes and procedures then traditionally form the bedrock for future partner interactions. However, formal protocols are not generally focussed on the quality of interaction between collaborative partners involved in the complicated and demanding day-to-day interactions of delivery. This thesis suggests that this additional layer of relational focus, referred to in this study as building a shared collaborative ethos, is a crucial part of intra-collaborative dynamics and underpins the sustainability, creativity and quality of collaborative delivery. The significance of inter-personal relationships in collaborative success was noted by participants at multiple levels across both collaborative systems in this study, in the UK and in the Netherlands.

In Chapter 2, I quoted Lao Tsu's stanza relating to this crucial interplay between structure and relationality. Lao Tsu writes of how *'We hammer wood for a house but it is the inner space that makes it livable'*, drawing attention to how a structure is one thing but how that structure is utilised is quite another. I referred too to my own experiences of teaching and collaboration where open and semi-structured elicitive group facilitation methodologies (cf Lewin 1947; Lederach 1995; Meyer & Land 2006) enabled participants to share diverse

experiences and perspectives while engaging their imaginations in jointly created spaces of possibility. The interactive and elicitive format of the data collection sessions in this empirical research generated a similar dynamic, allowing participants enough structure to work together productively (albeit in some groups more than others) while leaving space for emergent thought and action to appear. The success of this approach was spelt out by several different participants both at the time of the research (UK Group 1, NL Group 2) and in the feedback meetings a month after Round 1 of the data collection in both countries. In NL Group 1, the leaders of the organisation spoke about the value of stepping away from their normal position of leadership to take an equal role in the group thanks to an outside presence (the researcher) facilitating those discussions.

These reflections on how to create such jointly created spaces of possibility are highly relevant within collaborations with diverse and sometimes contradictory value systems, styles of working and experiences. To maintain such collaborations over time requires an ongoing synthesis of these myriad perspectives, a task which is not easy and which demands specific and focussed attention from the start (Lederach 2007). Without that attention, collaborations have been shown to quickly run into difficulties as tensions and conflicts arise across the collaborative system. Numerous studies have looked at how dysfunction can take root caused by an instrumental 'new managerial' mindset and result in tensions between a top-down and bottom up approach to collaboration (Kokx & van Kempen 2009) and/or as a result of 'colonising' collaborative work (Murphy & Arenas 2010). This concept of colonization is particular apt in cross-cultural collaborations where an instrumental approach to engaging close-to-the-ground organisations is used as a way of getting buy-in from marginalised groups to an already fixed agenda set by larger players in system.

The exclusion of non-managerial voices from decision making processes noted in previous studies (van Bortel 2013) was in evidence throughout the data in this study and found in all of the four groups. In one example, UK Group 1 listed who was involved in the delivery system from 'top to bottom' (see map) while discussing how decision-making processes within the design and delivery structure were skewed towards senior management with a perceived dearth of care or concern for how community organisers would fare once the funding came to an end. NL Group 1 provided an account of how work was commissioned and then undermined by the same local housing association professionals. Such a disconnect



between the strategic and operational levels of collaborative work has been noted by scholars in urban studies (Kokx & van Kempen 2009; Kokx 2011) and was evident here too: one group in particular – UK Group 2 – showed a startling opaqueness in the relationship between managerial and operational roles. P8 talked of her sense of disconnect to the programme as a whole despite (or perhaps because of) being the most senior managerial figure present while P9 expressed how differently he had experienced the collaborative structure to others in the group. The dysfunction at the heart of the top-down UK collaborative system emerged clearly, noted by participants across multiple levels of the system although particularly in evidence in the findings of UK Group 2, the managerial level of the collaboration. The chaotic mapping output, hectic energy line and fractious interactions between participants in UK Group 2 suggested a system riven with rivalry, competition and confusion. The UK system also showed signs of the ‘colonising’ of other groups to achieve a hidden top-down agenda, asking partners across the collaborative structure to use their skills, experiences and connections to roll out what the delivery organisation (UK Group 1) saw as a blatantly politically-informed rather than genuine programme of work.

In this study, I have focussed on the synergy of different collaborative perspectives in part through the lens of mapping energy shifts in the group dynamics. There has been increasing attention on ‘human energy’ from organisation scholars over past 15 years because of its relatedness to motivation, with calls for further studies into human energy to help clarify both its use and its meaning in research. This study contributes to that debate, developing the idea of energy as an affective quality, a dynamic process with ebbs and flows, virtuous and vicious cycles, growth, collapse, equilibrium and oscillation (Quinn et al. 2012). As proposed by Fredrickson and Branigan (2005 in Quinn et al. 2012), the findings in this study suggest that engaging with human energy patterns could provide a resource for broadening the thought/action repertoires of team and collaborative partners, as well as enabling a better understanding of power dynamics at play in collaborative relationships.

## Power and micro-politics in collaborative delivery

Micro power dynamics are a dominant but under-researched theme in the field of multi-sectoral and cross-cultural collaborations (Davies 2009, Kokx 2011; Paffenholz 2013) and there have been extensive calls for research into how both vertical and horizontal power relations operate within and across such structures (Reich & Reich 2006; Teernstra & Pinkster 2015; Dewulf & Elbers 2018). To contribute to these gaps in the literature, this study actively invited participants to reflect on issues of power at the same time as performing power relations in the room by working together on a series of set tasks. This layer of unconscious engagement with power dynamics in the data collection session was revealing, providing fascinating insights into how each and every participant was involved in power games even in the group which worked most efficiently and creatively. There was also an intriguing difference in the power dynamics in each of the groups as the tasks shifted and the data collection format changed, with evidence of individuals who had previously taken over or dominated the space becoming more open to equal discussion when they felt less ownership of the discussion or topic in hand (UK Group 1; NL Group 2). In other words, the unconscious sense of privilege was fluid even in such small workgroups if the meeting format and focus allowed it to be. This has interesting implications for the format of meetings and the structuring of discussions across a collaborative network and supports a call for the development of devolved leadership structures (Armistead et al. 2007; Crosby & Bryson 2010). As the data collected here suggests, where there was less emphasis on management knowledge and structure other and different voices were able to be heard.

It is already documented in the literature that there is a need for 'professionals' to acknowledge that knowledge is never innocent and is deeply implicated in the apparatus of power, governance and control (Klein 2004; Meek & Newell 2005; Hendrick 2008). For public servants used to working with a linear, target-driven timelines and faced with external targets and demands, it can be hard to engage open-heartedly with others' ways of working and experiences and to avoid seeing knowledge different to their own as 'less than' rather than simply 'different from' (Klijn & Koppenjan 2012; Walters 2015; Phillimore 2015). While in part this may well relate a managerial mindset where negotiating such differences is characterised as time wasting, an unconscious 'less than' tendency was observable in this

study, seen in both collaborative systems at the managerial levels in UK Group 2 and NL Group 2.

One way of addressing such hidden but impactful micro-power relations and developing individual and organisational reflexivity could be by paying more attention to how different knowledge frames arrive in a space and how they are negotiated (Dietz et al. 1989, Charkoudian & Wilson 2006). Focusing on this issue with intentionality is important, because without recognising the presence of beneath-the-surface bias in group interactions there is little chance of changing them. There was evidence in this study of how unconscious privilege noted by other scholars (Healey 2007; Murphy & Arenas 2010, Paffenholz 2013) was in operation across both systems. Perceived ranking within and across organisations granted more airspace and leadership to various individuals in the group discussions in UK Group 1, while in NL Group 2, the four ‘professionals’ working alongside a community member were scrupulously polite and welcoming but dominated proceedings from the start. While none of this felt out of the ordinary at the time, the assumption of control over the process left little room for other more inclusive ways of working to be accommodated. Marked majority/minority dynamics in relation to ethnicity and belonging informed both the direction and content of discussions as well as decision-making procedures in both of the Dutch groups and arguably in the UK groups also. Both UK groups used the language of ‘insiders’ and ‘outsiders’ – in UK Group 1, one participant used the term ‘outsider’ to describe the position of Community Resolve as a delivery organisation in relation to the large collaborative system, and in UK Group 2, ‘outsider’ was also used, this time to refer to anyone sitting outside a tight managerial circle who were ‘in the know’ – as the speaker made plain, they were in the inner circle. This may have contributed to why the most informed and yet apparently least entitled participant in UK Group 2 felt unable to contribute his extensive knowledge.

This beneath-the-surface quality of group collaboration and unconscious power plays emerged strongly in the findings, surfacing through the visualization and detailed text analysis of 5 minutes of interaction in each of the groups. The dominance of certain voices over others (cf UK Group 2) and particularly in relation to minority/majority dynamics (cf NL Group 2) appears to echo questions asked in recent collaborative studies as to whether less powerful or marginalised actors genuinely obtain more access to power by being included

in multi-sectoral and / or cross-cultural collaborations (Woodhill & Vugt 2011). In this study, there was evidence that while strong efforts were being made to include non-majority members in this research process, as in the wider delivery work, unconscious assumptions were impeding rather than helping the process of genuinely including 'outsider' voices despite best intentions.

## Ways of engaging with conflict

As the need and demand to work in cross-sector collaborations has increased, professional, cultural and personal siloes and boundaries are regularly crossed with the result that the potential for badly managed conflict to occur has escalated. A key focus of this research project was to provide fresh insights into how hotspots or fields of tension in group interactions are arrived at and negotiated as collaborative partners work together (Hermans et al, 2012; Wrede & Shriberg 2003; MacLure 2013). The focus on the groups' nonverbal interactions through the use of the energy graphs and overlaid points of laughter was particularly helpful in gaining a deeper level of understanding of shifts in group dynamics. While this form of data analysis was not anticipated at the start of the study, the focus on nonverbal communications in the group was a significant breakthrough in relation to understanding the group process and any indicators for conflict points. It was also a key moment in understanding the usefulness of focusing on the concept of 'the space between' in conflict situations, providing an image of thought that opened up the idea of conflict as a fluid and shifting space of possibility and connection rather than focussing on the separateness of individuals and their oppositional positions.

In Chapter 2, I suggested that reconceptualising conflict as 'a space between' could help individuals and organisations leave their positions to one side and open up to radically different perspectives to their own. The importance of 'the space between' concept steadily increased throughout the study, drawing attention to the emptiness-which-is-full-of-potential, an opportunity for individuals and organisations in myriad settings to gain more understanding of themselves and others and where co-created emergent thought and direction could occur (Janssens & Steyaert 2001; Thissen 2011). I posited that while a proactive engagement with the inevitable conflicts that arise in multi-sectoral collaborations

is one route to collaboration sustainability, blocks to working creatively with the disparate perspectives of day-to-day collaboration lie within the very individuals involved in carrying out collaborative goals. Research has shown how little individuals understand about their personal attitude to conflict and how their patterns of interaction, worldviews and blind spots impact on others (Golec & Federico 2004, Wilkinson 2014). While it can be a challenge to maintain an open mind and to remain flexible without losing balance, a commitment to reflexive practice can provide a foundation block for developing the mutual level of understanding and trust that is inherent to sustainable endeavours. As my own accounts of collaboration in Chapter 2 show, numerous beneath-the-surface dynamics impacted on my ability within those environments to negotiate points of conflict that arose. In both examples, I observed how my personal insecurities and anxieties affected my engagement with others, although these were not necessarily obvious to those I was collaborating with. In both experiences, I had a sense of the self – myself - as being in a state of constant flux, responding continuously to my environment as well as to specific historical and psychic pressures ranging from my experience of family to an awareness of gender.

In Chapter 6, I noted how in this study all four data collection groups worked to hold themselves together as a single entity (which requires stability) while exploring new ideas and taking decisions (which requires movement and flexibility), resulting in a constant flow of exchange, negotiation, stand-off and compromise. As individuals with various identities and values, self-interests and fears, there was evidence in the findings of how all the participants were navigating multiple levels of conflict, managing their own internal contradictions and differences (cf UK Group 1); the gaps between their personal values and those of the organisation they represented (cf UK Group 2); and differences between their personal and organisational values and those of other participants in the room (cf NL Group 1; NL Group 2). My findings also show copious examples of the various strategies employed by participants as they encountered ideas and perspectives that conflicted with their own, ranging from clash (UK Group 2), indignation (NL Group 1) or ignoring an event altogether (UK Group 1) alongside more subtle withdrawals from the space (UK Group 2) or the nuanced enforcement of entitlement or privilege (all groups, as set out above). Most strategies appeared to aim to minimise or avoid points of conflict rather than proactively naming and exploring them.

This emerged particularly strongly during the values task. As values are closely linked to cultural and societal contexts they can be seen as a bridge between the individual and their ecologies, with some suggesting that they matter trans-situatively across an individual's range of identities, environments and subjectivities (cf Bednarek-Gillen 2015). Data from the value task in this study did provide some evidence of movement through layers of meaning in relation to context, as participants shifted from an individual definition of a particular value to a group understanding. The task surfaced the underlying motivations for participants to choose one task over another, many of which showed clear links back to childhood experiences as well as teachings they had encountered across their lifespans. There was evidence too of how differently individuals interpret verbal communications, with the connotations of particular values rooted in specific emotional and historical experiences rather than in a dictionary definition, as well as distinct differences in how participants' related to specific words – 'integrity' was just one good example.

Among the strategies observed during the values task as well as across the whole sessions are several examples of how 'unwelcome' knowledge or perspectives were dealt with by participants through both verbal and nonverbal interaction. Two notable nonverbal signifiers of conflict in this data were laughter and silence - examples include the disparagement or dismissal of 'unacceptable' ideas through a 'joke' (UK Group 2) and a refusal to engage (UK Group 1; NL Group 1). In Chapter 5, I explored the use of laughter across a field of tension in each of the groups, noting how it played a significant part in all four although serving a slightly different purpose in relation to conflict across the two systems. Through a basic categorisation developed in this study, I observed that laughter in the UK was primarily socially divisive or self focused, while in the Dutch groups it was clearly more socially cohesive and used to avoid or smooth over any potential conflicts and to encourage group cohesion. This is such a small study that neither the categorisation of laughter nor the cultural implications of the laughter findings are generalisable. But it does point to something very interesting about how our values and behaviours in work environments are mirroring the wider social systems and discourses that surround us. This conclusion is supported by the only clear exception to this cohesive use of laughter in the Dutch groups, by P15 of Moroccan heritage in NL Group 1. During the values exercise, P15 seems to be goading the rest of the group around the meaning of values and uses laughter as a divisive rather than in genuinely amused or cohesive way. Given the focus of reflections

in this study on majority / minority micro-politics in collaborative working, this in itself suggests that laughter could be seen as an indicator of conflict points to come, just as it appears to foreshadow conflict points in the energy lines.

*'I had been content to know nothing or to believe false information, I had once more dodged the word 'why', so that now, as I peel the onion, my silence pounds in my ears.'*

GRASS 2008:232

Recently reading Gunter Grass' devastatingly honest autobiography on growing up in Nazi Germany, the significance of where we put our attention and what we choose to engage with (Scharmer 2006; Zerubavel 2007) resonated strongly with me in this light of this study. Among my extensive journal entries relating to the reflexive psychodynamic process was the suggestion that *'things that are said take on a life of their own, as if the things that are not said are therefore not important – while in fact maybe those ARE the very things that you need to talk about, the things that are NOT said valuable for making fully considered decisions'*. As you would expect, silence occurred in all four groups in the study, but what was surprising for the rater group was how those silences could be heard to hold a number of different qualities: reflection, puzzlement, resentment, disapproval, withdrawal. This supported a recent study that suggests working with audio recordings only of group interaction can actually increase empathy within researchers (Chandler et al 2015; Kraus 2017) and also suggests that silence would indeed be a useful additional tool for qualitative researchers (Mazzei 2007). In UK Group 1, it was in fact an extended period of silence that formed the heart of the field of tension. This was interesting, especially when set against an interaction between the same two participants - P1 and P2 - during a feedback meeting a month later. The second interaction was also sticky but with persistence on both sides reached a different outcome – that of deeper shared reflection and self-realisation. There were many variables that could have made a difference to the quality of their interaction on the second occasion, but nonetheless while a retreat into silence in the first example resulted in the group interaction drawing to a halt, a limited and inward-looking outcome, a second more generous and open encounter in a safer environment led to emergent thought processes that were jointly creative and insightful.

## Indicators of sustainability

Change is a constant feature of the collaborative experience whether individuals and organisations come together for shorter or longer periods. During that time, those who have signed up to the collaboration face multiple and multi-directional conflicts that they need to negotiate separately and together, from the internal dynamics of the collaborative structure itself to operationalizing the services they aim to deliver and responding to the broader societal and political contexts they are working within. Although both the collaborations explored in this study had lasted over several years, the UK programme had already wrapped up before data collection in 2016 while the NL group have recently ceased their delivery. Interestingly, the two programmes ended for very different reasons. In the UK, the closed and top-down collaborative structure led to enormous tensions across the system with a gradual dilution of its strength and focus over five years, leaving it vulnerable to political maneuverings. In the Netherlands, the precarity of living and working on the edge over 20 years combined with major life changes finally led to a disbanding of Inkr8 in 2018, an organisation that never wanted to be an organisation in the first place and who were exhausted by driving bottom-up collaborations with too few resources, unrecognised and unseen.

For many larger multi-sectoral collaborations the shared delivery of key infrastructure services can endure over years or decades. The inevitability of shifting contexts both internally and externally has profound implications for the nature of collaborative sustainability, encompassing membership and leadership; the creation and maintenance of a collaborative ethos; and the storing and constructive use of a reservoir of collaborative history and experience to support the delivery of high-quality services. In the sections above, I have already outlined several possible routes to collaborative sustainability which build on the findings of this and previous studies, namely raising awareness of the need for:

- an informal, jointly negotiated collaborative ethos that supports and develops interpersonal and interorganisational relationships, and the allocation of time and resources for this ongoing function;
- increased reflexivity for all those working in collaboration, with an allocation of resources and support for that process including internal and external facilitation;



- a joint exploration of how conflicting views, differences and inequalities will be openly acknowledged and addressed.

Research into enduring and highly collaborative teams has demonstrated that such teams do indeed engage in such ongoing negotiation of values, ideologies and cultural frames to achieve maximum synergy (cf Csikszentmihalyi 1996; Baker et al. 2003; Heffernan 2012). There was some evidence of this in my study also across the four examples of how groups worked together. The most effective of the four groups (UK Group 1) demonstrated high levels of creativity and output with a minimum of debilitating conflict. It is interesting to note that this group was experienced in working with culturally diverse teams, both internally (ie as a delivery team) and in their delivery environment and are also all trained mediators and facilitators. It was also noticeable that the two groups who produced the most coherent maps (UK Group1 and NL Group 2) both began mapping the system with a joint discussion about how to approach the construction of a map, who should be at the centre of the map and how they as a group – the first a delivery team, the second a group of professionals supporting the delivery – should be represented. In the case of the UK Group 1, this process of reflection and negotiation continued across the hour-long task as an active discussion of how and where power was manifesting in the system.

In this study, the centrality of co-produced knowledge is a given, with participants acknowledged as experts in their own situations and each holding an essential piece of the puzzle. The importance given to the situated, context specific knowledge of local participants parallels the perspective of conflict transformation theorists and practitioners, who see the inclusion of participants from all levels of a conflict system as crucial to sustaining positive peace (cf Lederach 2003). Building on this principle, I mooted the idea in Chapter 2 that Lederach's 'transformational platform' could be adapted as a potentially useful model in relation to the sustainability of multi-sectoral and cross-cultural collaborations. These 'process structures' were originally conceived as providing a sustainable platform for social and positive peace in post-violent conflict societies and were rooted in a complexity understanding of conflict and systems. Lederach's ideas recognised the need for a locally-based multi-level and multi-actor platform as a central feature of sustainable peacebuilding, providing a flexible but stable presence in volatile and rapidly changing environments (Lederach 2007, Hendrick 2008). Here, I suggest re-imagining multi-sectoral collaborations

in this way to encourage a process view of intra-collaborative relationships and the dynamic, nonlinear nature of systems and social change.

Lederach later questioned whether enough time and attention were given in the field to the building and maintenance of such collaborative platforms, or whether these concerns were sidelined in the challenge of delivery in complex social environments. Such collaborative platforms require a flexible structure to enable a variety of contributions, leadership styles and remits to co-exist inside a coherent but loose multi-directional structure. Saying 'yes' to such a mess means organising differently, as Barrett suggests in his lessons from jazz. He sees the need for all involved to step into fluid and changing roles of both leadership and followship to maximise the potential synergy of collaborative working.

Of the four groups in this research, UK Group 1 seemed to be able to grasp 'the mess' mostly clearly, producing the most nuanced and multi-levelled map while working under pressure, as well as exploring aspects of collaborative working dynamics at a structural and relational level. How UK Group 1 achieved that level of efficiency was not perhaps not a coincidence, coming from an organisation with high levels of facilitation skills and the aspiration of a flat hierarchical structure. Its internal use of mediation principles supported the building and maintenance of an inclusive and diverse team and allowed for simultaneous and ongoing attention to both structural and relational aspects of the organisation.

All four discussions groups unearthed numerous useful insights in relation to sustainability, from the importance of individual rather than organisational connection in actually getting the work programme delivered to the impact of context and ecology, our tendencies to develop 'rose-tinted memories' of our own behaviours unless constructively challenged, and how those with the loudest voices or who are seen, or see themselves, as 'leaders' do not necessarily contribute more to creative endeavour, and how an apparently small and unrecognised contribution can transform the synergy of the whole.

To insist of having your point heard in the face of unaware privilege requires persistence. That in itself requires a level of internal confidence which can be in short supply and especially perhaps at the interface of different knowledge types – of 'professionals' and community members, for example. There is evidence in this study of voices who were heard despite resistance, achieving a key on the map or a final four value of freedom; and also of

those which were not, smothered by dominant voices and behaviours to the detriment of the final group outcome. What allowed the dominance of some voices over others was instructive and surprisingly fluid, sometimes associated with longterm association, sometimes with traditional hierarchy and management structures, sometimes with the seniority that comes with age. Participants drew attention to social capital and access to government connections and contacts; to the significant role played by individuals in decision-making roles (as opposed to embedded processes); to the importance of personal agendas; to assumptions made around IT capacities and skills; to how programme resources were distributed; and to the tension between who the programmes were aimed at (for example, local residents) and where the strategic power in the collaborative structure actually lay.

As participants noted in this study, there were many possible ways of ‘mapping’ collaboration, from along a timeline or through a management hierarchy to the ‘felt sense of things’ – the former focussing on structural elements to collaboration, the latter to relational dynamics. Where collaborative groups put their attention is where the energy goes, drawing attention to the importance of reflexivity in collaborative work and to the simultaneous engagement with both structural and relational aspects of collaboratives, especially where there are already in-built hierarchies of experience and connection.

## An emergent research paradigm

As noted in Chapter 1, my imagination was first captured by the idea of complexity metaphors and concepts in relation to 20 years of delivery work in the highly complex social environment of central Bristol, SW England. As someone who had lived a life crossing boundaries and actively engaging with difference, I responded viscerally to the idea of moving away from certainties, categorisation and linear thinking to allow a more fluid and uncertain engagement with myself and others. I was fortunate enough to have the confidence to engage with what for many are destabilising and challenging ideas. When I came to design this piece of research, I was equally excited by the literature exploring the possibilities and implications of complexity thinking in qualitative research (cf Kuhn 2007; Burns 2013; Nijssen 2014; Middleton-Kelly et al 2018; Hetherington et al 2018). For me, taking

such a path through the PhD meant eschewing safe and well-established practices such as proving a hypothesis or ensuring ‘manageable’ data through the use of semi-structured interview schedules. I was interested in the innovative edge of qualitative research, of pushing the boundaries and watching for unexpected synergies. From the start, I understood that taking such an exploratory approach to understanding conflict, power and collaborative dynamics was risky and held absolutely no guarantees of coherence or validity – but it was exciting.

My research approach rested on a core premise: that when unpredictability and change are accepted as the norm, reliance on measurable certainties becomes redundant and the search for alternative strategies through which to understand and engage with the world becomes essential. For me, understanding the potential in the concept of emergence - defining emergence in this study as a dynamic, energetic, unpredictable synergy of difference – was key in terms of understanding the environment I wished to research; in terms of designing the research itself; and in terms of reflecting on the findings that emerged as the study progressed. The findings included here cover a plethora of unexpected turns, ranging from the theoretical conceptualisation of working at the interface of difference as ‘the space between’ to visualizing intangible phenomena such as energy and a focus in on the significance of nonverbal elements of communication in group interactions, especially in relation to the engagement with points of conflict. None of these ideas would have surfaced without a whole-hearted commitment to an intuitive and iterative research approach at every stage.

That is not to say that there is no structure here. There is, and plenty of it. There was a structured data collection session, with topics, times and facilitation approach clearly delineated. The same session structure exactly was used across four groups of similar size, drawn from similar levels of two collaborative systems. The same co-observer worked with me across each of the groups, and we followed an identical joint reflection process for each one – immediately before, immediately after and a week later with a reflection facilitator. The same analysis approach was applied to all four groups, and as documented in Chapter 4 there was a rigorous process of inter-rater reliability and consequent iterations applied to the generation of the qualitative data visualizations. The thesis structure itself is traditional and clear. So what I have aimed for in this research process is the same aspiration I had for

the organisation's work in Bristol, balancing structure and fluidity, a stable core and innovative fringe, an open elicitive form which leaves space for emergent ideas and approaches to be found and incorporated. It is, in fact, what I am advocating as a contribution to the literature on collaborative sustainability, the need to combine formal collaborative protocols with a jointly developed collaborative ethos that recognises and utilises 'the space between' for connection, stability and creativity.

Although critics have suggested that the concept of emergence is too loosely defined to be measured or explained (cf Corning 2002), complexity scientists have consistently pointed out that while you cannot predict emergent outcomes, you can possibly influence a particular direction of travel if indicators that something is going to emerge are identified. This study, with its interactive multi-level data collection design, shows what some of those indicators are in relation to conflict – and indeed, collaboration – in taskgroup environments. Here, the 'spaces between' participants become the spaces in which indicators for emergence appear. Illuminating those indicators was greatly helped by the data visualization process, which in itself addressed a gap in the research methodology literature highlighted in Chapter 2. As yet little attention has been paid to data visualization in qualitative research (Sloane 2009, Scagnoli & Verdinelli 2017) despite the critical role it plays in bringing to light patterns in large-scale data sets. This study has contributed to that methodology gap through the creation of a new methodology for generating qualitative data visualizations using computer software and by unearthing new understandings in the data as a result. As an additional benefit the essence of the data has been pithily conveyed, avoiding what Chandler et al. (2015) referred to as the 'mountains of words' often required to present qualitative findings.

My commitment to emergence as a central approach led to an encounter with the ideas of researching human experiential space (Dimitrov & Ebsary 1998; Kuhn & Woog 2007). From here I took the idea of using 'coherent conversations' as a data collection format, encouraging participants to take discussions in any direction that interested them rather than following a set path. In so doing, I could minimize my impact on the data collected (Kuhn & Woog 2007), particularly necessary given my positionality in this study and in line with complexity-informed understandings of research as needing to be open and transparent about researcher impact on any findings (Guetterman et al. 2017). To help access such beneath-the-surface dynamics at all levels of the study, I employed

psychodynamic observation techniques that added layers of researcher reflexivity (Clarke & Hoggett 2009). Using observation in this way led me to a number of the central findings set out here, including the significance of nonverbal data in the group interactions and the dynamic between majority and minority members of the groups.

As highlighted in Chapter 2, an emergent approach to studying the dynamics and patterns of interaction lends itself to working at a local level with case-based research methodologies (Byrne 2005; Kuhn & Woog 2006; Flyvbjerg 2006). The selection of two sites in two countries was in itself an emergent outcome of the research design as my commitment to a complexity-informed paradigm grew. As a result, the research was never conceived of as a comparison case study but more as an opportunity to study the dynamics of interactions across two separate collaborations, understanding each as a complex adaptive system. To my mind, this piece of research is stronger and more interesting as a result, providing perspective from outside the UK into the workings of multi-sectoral collaborations on the one hand (through both the literature and the empirical study), and allowing me to see if patterns of interaction replicated themselves at an individual, group, collaboration and wider societal level in two separate sites on the other.

Although engaging with the research in such an open-ended way could have led to less coherent findings, for me it promised a more accurate representation of the messy, complex nature of human interaction (Nijs 2014). I found it entirely consistent with understanding the world as fluid, dynamic and unpredictable and, as noted in Chapter 2, such an approach shares much with the skills of working with conflict (Hendrick 2008). In both environments, knowledge is understood as partial, local, context specific and bounded with new insight where knowledges meet (Klein 2000). Indeed, much current conflict literature also uses the concept of 'complex adaptive systems' to describe the highly interactive and volatile nature of entrenched destructive conflict (Hendrick 2008). Although this thesis draws on that literature, I have been addressing a different level of conflict altogether, focusing on the day-day experience of negotiating difference long before it escalates to violence (Galtung 1975; Dubiel 1998). Within that context, I argue that 'the space between' provides a useful image of thought in relation to engaging with conflict as it occurs, opening up what can become dense and competitive interactions by suggesting a threshold space of possibility where different needs and perspectives can be encountered (Ghorashi 2007; Thissen 2011). Where

this is understood, and appropriately structured spaces are created where differences can be met and considered without threat and alarm, joint and emergent thinking can begin and individuals and organisations are able to be more open to engaging with conflict's potential as a route to growth and creativity (Arendt 1968; Landau 2001; Dewulf et al 2009; Heffernan 2012).

## Assessing the research design

In the preceding sections, and indeed chapters, I have set out a number of reflections about the research design and its strengths and weaknesses. Below, I summarise those reflections before suggesting possible directions for future research to build on what is here.

### Strengths

Overall, I think the research design worked well for my purposes. It was tight, elegant and manageable for a PhD. It generated thick and interesting data from a number of different angles: from participants, observers, reflection groups, my journal, the rater team. And although exploratory, the concurrent and sequential use of multiple methodologies – from facilitation techniques to psychodynamic observation and the use of visualization processes during data collection and analysis stages and so on – gives the study a sense of solidity and credibility, albeit recognising its small size and its unique of-the-moment nature.

I also think the research design was coherent in its aims and its application. It was designed to explore the concept of emergence and had a number of different elements built in that allowed that possibility to occur. The research was looking at 'the space between' collaborative partners, and in conflict situations, and the methodologies chosen – such as the interactive data collection format - allowed precisely that

#### Strengths

- Innovative and interesting
- Coherent
- Collaborative
- Reflexive
- Valid
- Successful use of mixed methods
- Psychodynamic observation
- Data visualisations
- Combining nonverbal and verbal textual analysis
- Studying two systems
- Action research impact

#### Weaknesses

- Unpredictable and exploratory so unprepared for what emerged
- Possibly too diffuse?
- Data collection structure
- Lack of Dutch language
- Visualization anomalies

dynamic to be trapped in the data in a way that could then be studied. As collaboration was the central topic of the thesis, it was appropriate and useful to be working in collaboration as part of the research process across a number of spheres – with a co-observer, as part of rater team and with a data scientist and graphic designer as part of the visualization project. I also believe that my commitment to the need for researcher reflexivity and transparency is clearly evident in the final thesis and can be seen to have impacted on how the data was worked with and understood.

Although choosing to work with two case studies in separate countries (one of which was unfamiliar to me and where I did not speak the language) was surprising, it was ultimately more than worthwhile and for me, added to the credibility of the findings. In addition, it had the advantage of mitigating researcher bias, given my close connection with the UK case study, and opened up the action research elements of the research design. To overcome my lack of Dutch, I worked closely with a number of Dutch nationals to complete the study which was both helpful and illuminating, highlighting in both case studies where my perspectives were skewed (Hayes 2000; Greenwald & Krieger 2006) while also reflecting on how it was not just cultural differences that emerged in our understandings of the data, but also related to gender and age. Reflecting back on my use of cases, I feel that the thesis does support the claim that using case studies in *small-n* qualitative research can be at the forefront of theoretical development (cf Flyvbjerg 2006) despite its reputation for researcher bias. Here, I have worked hard on researcher transparency, which has been greatly aided by the engagement with cross-cultural research collaborators as much as through the visualization project.

Although the action research elements of the research were not a central focus of the design, this research has without a doubt had an influence of both systems I worked with and especially in the Netherlands, possibly because of my novelty value in relation to of both research approach and conflict understanding. Nonetheless, feedback from UK participants outlined how their understanding of the work delivered had been increased by taking part in the research and how they were taking away a more profound understanding of the interaction between collaborative structures and individual relationships that develop within that. In the Netherlands, there were similar reflections about the impact of the elicitive data collection sessions on building understanding across organisations, of taking



### Journal, November 2016 – on the action research impact of the study

Important to log evidence of the impact of the research *as it goes along* eg:

- in final go-rounds at end of each session and in feedback sessions eg UK Group 1 expressing how creating the map together gave them a sense of how they had contributed to a bigger network of delivery for the first time
- reports of other consequences / responses through networks eg new connections (NL Group 1) and opportunities (NL Group 2)
- adaption of research design / facilitation techniques for their own contexts eg as used by Dutch co-observer and reflection facilitator and delivery organization (NL Group 1) as well as wider network members (UK Group 2)
- increased connection across the network/system, leading to increased understanding of the work provided (all groups)
- research as development / consultation for NL Group 1
- development of schools programme using similar techniques / conflict understandings for Amsterdam teens (via co-observer, further training of trainers in the Netherlands).

away a bird's eye view of the value of the work (NL Group 2) and of adopting some of the understandings and working practices from the research by both participants and Dutch colleagues.

Possibly the most surprising and successful aspect of the research design from my point of view was the emergence of the visualization approach to exploring and presenting the data. Although I detail some of the many issues with that project below, nonetheless I think the fact that the visualizations emerged from the research at all is a testament to its openness and fluidity, and their inclusion in the findings here strongly supports the need to combine both verbal and nonverbal elements in qualitative research. In my opinion, this strong but completely unexpected outcome from the research also draws attention to the potential of space in qualitative research and supports calls for less structured, more open-ended research design (Nijs 2015; Hetherington et al 2018). I also feel that one of the real strengths of the study – and the visualization project – is the degree of research transparency that I have sought to build in here with the inclusion of the online data showing both the meaning units and the rater disparities during the visualization process.

## Weaknesses

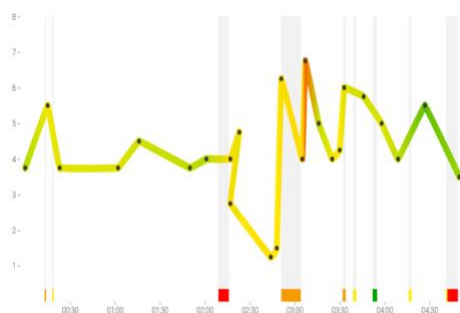
While for me the study's exploratory nature is a strength, it can be seen as a weakness too. Because I was so open to what participants might bring and to what might emerge from the data, I was essentially unprepared for what did in fact emerge. A good example of this was in the original aim to include audio material on the visualizations website (<https://stuijfzand-data.com/space-between-visualisations>). This would have added a really interesting dimension to the findings but as I had not specifically requested and gained consent from participants for this before the data collections sessions, it was not possible to proceed. So a weakness here – and perhaps in an open-ended research design in general – is, how do you adequately prepare for what you do not know is going to happen?

In terms of the specifics of the research design itself, there are a few dilemmas which arose as the study progressed and which would need to be more adequately addressed in any future research picking up on a similar design. While the use of four groups with an identical session structure was tidy and pleasing, there was a flaw in the plan as referred to in Chapter 3. The first group in each system was drawn from a single organisation, familiar with each other (at least in principle) and already sharing an organisational ethos and communication style to some degree. In addition, both these organisations delivered community facilitation training and were likely to have been trained to some degree in facilitation and negotiation techniques. Participants in the second group in each country system were drawn from across a number of different organisations, however, and generally from managerial roles. They therefore did not share an organisational culture or necessarily have facilitation skills. It is hard to assess to what degree those differences impacted on the data or findings highlighted here, although it could well go some way to account for the disparity in output between the two groups in the UK system. What is interesting, however, is that despite this design flaw, a recognisable and distinct pattern of interaction in each of the systems across the different levels does emerge in both the visualizations (number of meaning units, moderate mood, use of laughter) and the textual analysis in relation to negotiation during the values task.

A second flaw emerged during the emergent process of generating the visualizations. As referred to above, it is hard in an unfolding process to know exactly what you should be attending to in detail, given that some of the material you are engaging with may well be discarded down the line. My very initial attempts at quantifying the qualitative data started

with an impromptu division of one small data extract into meaning units. At the time, I was not at all certain that I would continue with the visualization plan and was therefore working fast. As the project developed, my lack of adequate attention in that first attempt was glaringly obvious once the final energy line was generated (over a year later). The issue had been how to deal with one person talking over others during UK Group 2's field of tension. I had split P6's talk into two and inserted the others' conversation in between but what this resulted in was a line that looked as if it was going backwards (*Figure 24, v1*) – an unacceptable anomaly (for some) on a linear graph. In the event, I changed the data time code to avoid the issue of the graph going backwards, although I resisted the idea initially. For me, it had provided an interesting example of non-linearity and chaos in the data, leaving threads open for reader interpretation and challenging linear expectations of both graphs and research tidiness. I include both versions below as a good example of the messiness of researcher innovation and of human interaction in general.

v1



v2

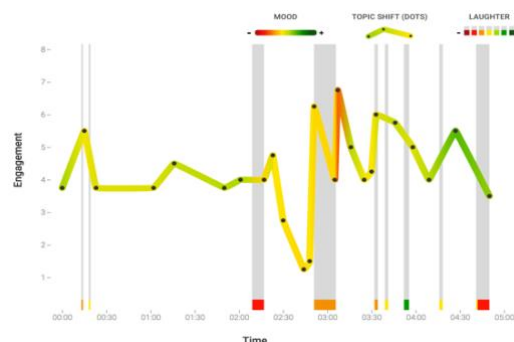


FIGURE 24 ANOMALIES IN THE VISUALIZATION PROCESS

The validity of the energy line visualization project as a whole is hard to assess without further work (see next section). As set out in Chapter 4, many different issues arose as the project unfolded, from the coding of the meaning units to the impact of different design iterations on how the data was understood. While the measuring and quantifying of the data was achieved by building on a previously used instrument, the mere process of rating each five-minute extract to a point where I was happy to continue took months and asked for hours of volunteer time from the committed rater team. Rating the engagement and mood

in 'the space between' participants rather than simply listening to a single person's contributions was difficult and new for us all. It became evident how focussed we all were on words rather than on sensing an overall feeling, and how culturally informed our interpretations of certain interactions could be. Nonetheless, and surprisingly to me and the other raters, once we found the technique that worked we were surprised by how aligned our ratings were (see website). And where there were big differences in rater responses, these opened up the space for some really interesting and revealing discussion.

In working with an overseas case study, there is no question that my lack of Dutch impacted on the management of the Dutch data collection groups. The first group working in Dutch re-organised the content of the session in the room in a way that I had not anticipated and could not address. When one participant arrived late, the ensuing disruption was again hard to manage as I had no real understanding of what was going on. Working in English, I would have found it much easier to regulate the disruption and encourage the group to stay focussed. In addition, I had to have the transcripts of the data collection sessions transcribed and translated, and as my Dutch improved, I began to question the completeness of those translations. Despite these challenges, however, I am confident that the value of including the Dutch case study greatly outweighs these drawbacks.

Overall, I am happy to stand by what has emerged from the empirical research design. While it may not be flawless I think it is interesting, innovative and challenging, and presents some new ideas in relation to qualitative research at the same time as unearthing practical ideas and suggestions to contribute to a real-life issue of sustainability and collaboration.

### Pointers for future study

**In terms of research methodology**, it has been notable how much interest the data visualization project has provoked as I have presented it at conferences. As set out above, there are many many issues with our very early-stage attempt to bring nonverbal aspects of group interaction alive in this way. Nonetheless I hope that what we have begun in this study

will provide an initial starting point for trial-and-error investigation by those interested in what an iterative engagement with visual data can bring to the research process.

What the data visualization project has succeeded in doing is highlighting the usefulness of combining both nonverbal and verbal data analysis approaches qualitative research, a gap highlighted in the literature (Onwuegbuzie et al. 2010). There is no doubt that in this study, combining both ways of reading the data provided more than the sum of their individual parts. This, I think, is a useful corroboration of calls in the literature for qualitative researchers to take seriously the value that nonverbal elements of communication can bring and encourages future researchers to build on these ideas. All three aspects of nonverbal communication featured in this analysis – energy, laughter and silence – have received limited attention from qualitative researchers despite calls for further research in previous studies (Mazzei 2007; Dupret 2010). The laughter categorization used here was original and very basic, as well as being previously untested, and could usefully be refined in subsequent qualitative studies of group interaction.

From the start, this research design was influenced by psychosocial understandings and research techniques looking at how the internal coherence of individuals informs their behaviours and interactions with others they are working with (Clarke 2003). I would support other calls for the need to explore ‘under-the-surface’ dynamics in qualitative research, both between researcher and participants and between participants themselves, from the perspective of the research environment as a space of nonverbal and unconscious interaction (Hoggett & Clarke 2011). Methodologies used in this study to address this, as influenced by other scholars, include the use of interactive data collection sessions and ‘coherent conversations’ (Kuhn 2007); the use of visual tasks by participants during those sessions (Crosby & Bryson 2010); and the use of psychodynamic observation and additional reflection with a third party facilitator to unearth the assumptions and projections of the observer team (Fraher 2004; Davar 2008). I would also suggest that exploring the idea of researching into ‘the space between’, actively searching out liminal and threshold encounters to observe and better understand encounters across difference, could further test the concept as an image of thought and potentially make a contribution to numerous literatures cited here – urban studies, management and collaborative literature, conflict transformation and resolution literatures, psychosocial studies – as well as others.

Although I have not stressed the action research element of this study, I do believe that the ideas inherent in a systemic action research approach are useful for working with a complexity paradigm and should be developed further. In this study, SAR principles were adapted to involve practitioners at various stages and at all levels of the research system, addressing central issues of participation, decision-making, power and privilege through the data collection design (Burns 2007). These are all areas of research that could be further explored.

**The theoretical contributions** of this study lie at the interface of practice, academia and personal interest and reflection, as well as in the synergy of themes drawn from the various literatures that underpin the research – complexity thinking, conflict transformation and psychosocial understandings, and management and collaborative studies. My unique perspectives stretch across longterm work in complex social environments to my training as a facilitator, conflict coach and mediator, and provided a deep and varied basket of experiences to draw on. They informed this study at every level and sit behind its core proposals: that we look to reposition our understanding of non-violent conflict as ‘the space between’ in order to start understanding how to engage creatively with difference; and that we embrace the idea of our world as complex and unpredictable and – more importantly – focus on how to build that reality into our practices of collaboration in whatever field.

For me, the strongest concepts to emerge from this piece of work at both a theoretical and applied level include the ideas around actively engaging with structure and relationality in building collaborative sustainability; a reworking of Lederach’s concept of a ‘transformational platform’ as a useful device for understanding the process nature of locally-based collaborations; the repositioning of conflict as normal, inevitable and potentially creative; and the concept of ‘space between’ as an image of thought as well as a point for action in both collaborative and conflict settings. All are topics that would benefit from further reflection, testing and debate.

As I reflect deeper on these themes I realise how interlinked they are. As my review of a necessarily limited range of literatures over the last few years have shown, there is much written about collaboration and its challenges, which are generally addressed through two distinct routes – from the direction of structure and leadership in management, organisational and urban studies, or from a relational perspective through the studies of

social psychologists, sociologists and social constructionists (there of course, a few notable exceptions where the two are combined cf Healey, Taylor, Meek & Newell). While the difficulties of multi-sectoral collaboration are well established, there is very little written about how these challenges might be addressed or to what end, although there are precedents for this in the field of conflict resolution and more specifically within conflict transformation approaches and understandings. By combining these perspectives with more traditional management and organisational analysis and by focusing on the importance of intra-collaborative relationships, this thesis suggests both conceptual shifts and practical ways in which collaborative sustainability could be approached, which is an original contribution to the literature.

Central to this focus on improved intra-collaborative relational workings is the reconceptualization of (non-violent) conflict within that context as normal, inevitable and malleable. While there is considerable resistance from organisations and individuals to acknowledging and naming conflict where it arises, I propose here that positioning it differently in people's minds as 'the space between' – a space of possibility and synergy rather than an oppositional space of persuasion - can offer an opportunity to use it creatively. As I discuss in my brief concluding remarks in Chapter 8 that follow, my personal experiences of building and working with a highly diverse and creative organisation in Bristol over 15 years or more indicates that such ways of engaging can be operationalised (Wilkinson & Jagoo 2014; Wilkinson 2014).

## Chapter 8:

### Final remarks

From my personal experiences of working in multiple cross-cultural and multi-sectoral collaborations, I know that this is not an easy task. In the vast majority of cases, hardpressed and time-poor collaboration partners are reluctant to invest the time they have for the work in the development of relationships that may or may not endure. As a result, far more time is spent on establishing formal protocols than developing a real understanding of who else they are working with and what they can contribute. While this is very understandable as a short term gain, it does not, however, address the core issue at hand – that intra-collaborative conflicts will arise and that without the ‘upfront’ work to create a joint and mutually acceptable agreement on how to engage with these constructively, they will undermine collaborative sustainability and, crucially, creativity in the long run. Results may be achieved, yes, but collaborative endeavours will be held back by conflicting dynamics as opposed to amplified by synergy, with the risk of losing quality and innovation along the way. In this thesis I am suggesting that to generate the best value from collaborative working, there needs to be equal attention paid to the relational aspects of collaborative partnerships as to the formal protocols and structures. Giving enough time and focus to relationality is an investment of resources that will pay handsomely in the end, and especially when working in highly diverse and socially complex environments.

Community Resolve grew to consist of an unusually diverse and cohesive workforce drawn from across the spectrum of Bristol communities. As interviews with 30+ collaborative partners across Bristol showed in an impact report on 10 years work in the city, the organisation was renowned for its high levels of flexibility, innovation, creativity and internal coherence (Wilkinson & Jagoo 2014). In Community Resolve, this level of high-quality team synergy was achieved through the application of mediation / conflict transformation principles to the internal workings of the organisation as well as to its delivery programmes. At the heart of the organisation was a commitment to working in ‘the space between’ our very different life experiences, with space for creativity and time given to joint team building and learning that was as significant as the time given to the daily managerial organisational functions. This constructive pooling of our perspectives was indeed the route to co-creating



notably innovative programmes of work and relied on an agreed organisational ethos that let us transcend some drastically different worldviews within the organisation.

How unusual this was first pointed out to me by Professor Paul Hoggett in the early 2000s, then developing the Centre for Psycho-social Studies at the University of the West of England. He offered me free mentorship for several years as the organisation got underway, although it took me years to work out why. For him, this simultaneous attention to both structure and relational work was highly unusual because of the separation of the two in theory and often in practice. It was Paul who first suggested the idea of Community Resolve as 'complexity in action' to me.

In 2008 or so, I met Lois Yellowthunder at a Conflict Research Society (CRS) conference. I was presenting the work of the organisation, which by then was working across the city in multiple settings with residents, workers, managers, school children. In my attempt to reposition conflict as normal, and with a plea for conflict theorists to focus their attention on the UK and not just overseas, I was swimming against the tide. There was no research, literature or statistics on UK conflict dynamics, very few resources pointed towards developing skills in understanding or working with conflict and most people would confidently tell me – from MPs to academics – that conflict did not exist in the UK. And then I would head back to Bristol to another young man stabbed in a deadly 20-year feud between teens straddling the M32 long before the current furore (as of 2019) about stabbings in London.

While I understood their point – as in their definition of conflict meant violence and armed conflict - what I was discovering through our everyday work across the entire city and way beyond was that people were indeed experiencing conflict in multiple aspects of their lives, and suffering from it too. However, without being able to name conflict as such it was hard for people to understand how to engage with it constructively. For most of those we encountered through Community Resolve, the only frame for understanding conflict was 'fight or flight', underlining how negatively conflict was generally understood. The impact of this lack of skills and understanding is becoming ever more apparent at all levels of the UK system – politicians, journalists, business leaders, residents, families – as people struggle to engage with the ideas of others and to work together to develop joint and creative ways forward.

However, as someone who had been looking carefully for many years at idea of both complexity and conflict, Lois got it immediately. For her, as for other complexity thinkers, conflict was a given – an inevitable dynamic at the interface of difference in a world made up of complex adaptive systems. She understood far better than me (at the time) how Community Resolve was intuitively developing along complexity lines, embracing multiplicity, fluid and adaptive, and with a stable organisational core that nonetheless supported and encouraged its innovative fringe. At that point, she and colleagues were looking at entrenched community conflicts in the US around the use of shrinking lakes. They were drawing on Lederach's platform idea and applying it not to peacebuilding in post-violent conflict zones but to ongoing friction and conflict in Minnesota, and cited Community Resolve as an example of how a transformational hub might look in practice in a city environment.

In 2013, I presented a 10-year impact report on the work of Community Resolve at another CRS conference attended by Lederach. I was talking about how we had spread out across the city, the multiple levels we worked at, our focus on structure and relationality. Afterwards, he was encouraging about the re-focusing of his platform concept onto a cityscape, noting how much more impactful it could be where the 'levels' of a system were closer to each other. As he had pointed out in his keynote speech, conflict transformation theorists and practitioners were becoming despondent about how hard-earned gains in sustainable peacebuilding on the ground (working internationally) were being repeatedly overwhelmed and undermined by massive global systems and neoliberal market forces.

Reflecting on the experience of writing this thesis, I highlight these encounters as significant influences on why and how I started the research project. Good ideas are one thing, but without the evidence that they can work in practice combined with the authoritative support of credible others, they can easily be lost. I knew the value in Community Resolve, but it was the fact that others could also see that value that kept us going then, and has kept me going through the PhD. And for me personally, the opportunity to approach these ideas from a totally new direction – through the vehicle of empirical research – has been hugely stimulating as well as surprisingly reaffirming.



## Appendices

### Appendix 1: Informed consent form

**Title of study (at time of data collection – 2016):**

Negotiating everyday conflict - an exploration of the complex nature of community-facing cross-sector collaboration

**Purpose of the study**

The study builds on the idea that having the skills to manage everyday conflict in a constructive way improves people's personal, social and professional lives. It looks at the experiences of two organisations that share these skills with people, and at the values of partners in the collaborative networks that surround this delivery. In particular, the research explores the interactions between individuals and groups working in collaboration. The research question it addresses is: ***What can a better theoretical and applied understanding of cross-sector collaboration dynamics contribute to managing difference at a local level?***

The data collected in this study will be useful for those working with everyday conflict in diverse communities; for those working with organisational and collaborative dynamics; for social policy makers; and for the qualitative research community.

**Participant's understanding**

- I agree to participate in this study that I understand will be submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at the University of Bristol.
- I understand that my participation is voluntary.
- I understand that all data will be collected using audio and video recordings as well as through observation
- I understand that all data collected will be limited to this use or other research-related usage as authorized by the University of Bristol.
- I understand that I will not be identified by name in the final product.
- I am aware that all records will be kept confidential in the secure possession of the researcher.
- I acknowledge that the contact information of the researcher and his advisor have been made available to me along with a duplicate copy of this consent form.
- I understand that I may withdraw from the study at any time with no adverse repercussions.

Subject's Full Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Subject's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date

Signed:

Researcher: Hen Wilkinson

Contact details: [hen.wilkinson@bristol.ac.uk](mailto:hen.wilkinson@bristol.ac.uk)

Advisor: Dr David Sweeting

Contact details: [david.sweeting@bristol.ac.uk](mailto:david.sweeting@bristol.ac.uk)

This research study is funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) of Great Britain.

## Appendix 2: Instructions for data collection sessions

**Research meet with Community Resolve, Bristol, Saturday April 9<sup>th</sup>, 12.30 refreshments, 1pm start**  
with Hen Wilkinson (07846126438) and Gertjan van Oldenborgh, 1 Priory Road, Bristol BS8 1TH  
Following introductions, this 2-hour session is to be managed by yourselves. Gertjan and Hen are taking observing and time-keeping roles only. Observation is being used here as a research approach, to let us think about how people interact rather than having to focus on running a meeting. It is not about critiquing what you do or say so please – relax and be yourselves. And thank you all for taking part!

The session – Once we have collected a few stories from you, we are going to ask you to complete the following tasks in a given time frame. Hen will act as timekeeper, and will let you know when there is 5 minutes left to complete the first task. She will also let you know when to find a group in the second task.

**1pm**     **Stories** – 2 mins each ...

**Why are you involved with Community Resolve? How did you get to be involved?**

**1.15-1.50pm**     **Task 1 – Working together, draw a picture/map of the collaboration to deliver training for the Community Organiser programme. On the map, include the following information in some way...**

**Who is involved? At any level?** – this can include – service users, partner agencies, community allies, other allies, funders, evaluators, academics, local officials/bodies, politicians, associates, trainers ... and anyone else

**Who is connected to who?** – indicate how strong / weak that relationship is. Is there good communication or not? Does the connection go both ways? (use mapping suggestions if useful)

**Who are the significant connectors in the network?** (names/roles)

Why/how are they significant?

**Where are the blocks / barriers in the network?** What do these look like?

**Where is the power in the network?** What sorts of power?

**1.50-2pm**     **Break**

**2-2.40 pm**     **Task 2 – Values behind the work**

**Alone (5 mins)** - Put your name at the top of the page, then quickly read through the values list attached. As you read, put a star next to any that jump out at you. Go back through them again and decide on your top 4.

**In threes (15 mins)** - share your top 4 with each other, explaining what they mean to you. As a group, agree 4 top values in relation to the work.

**In a six (20 mins)** – come together, and both groups share your top 4 values (8 in all, 4 from each group) and write them on a flip chart.

Do you all understand the same thing by these words?

Do these relate to personal values (P), organisational values (O) or collaboration (C) values?

Overlaps or differences between these areas? What are they?

**2.40-3pm**     **Reflections on the session**

**Thanks and goodbye**

### Appendix 3: List of values used in Task 2

Read these words fast, marking which values are most important to you. Tick as many as you want. Then choose the four most important. Prioritize and number these from 1-4.

- |                    |                     |                    |
|--------------------|---------------------|--------------------|
| 1. Worship         | 43. Approval        | 85. Improvement    |
| 2. Attention       | 44. Growth          | 86. Connection     |
| 3. Adaptation      | 45. Dexterity       | 87. Renewal        |
| 4. Attractiveness  | 46. Harmony         | 88. Confidence     |
| 5. Action          | 47. Deep listening  | 89. Docility       |
| 6. Completion      | 48. Humour          | 90. Kindness       |
| 7. Aggressiveness  | 49. Integrity       | 91. Enjoyment      |
| 8. Altruism        | 50. Calmness        | 92. Freedom        |
| 9. Ambition        | 51. Customer focus  | 93. Appreciation   |
| 10. Entertainment  | 52. Quality         | 94. Welfare        |
| 11. Assertiveness  | 53. Vibrancy        | 95. Winning        |
| 12. Authenticity   | 54. Love / warmth   | 96. Security       |
| 13. Adventure      | 55. Loyalty         | 97. Self-control   |
| 14. Balance        | 56. Charity         | 98. Meaningfulness |
| 15. Ability        | 57. Accuracy        | 99. Being careful  |
| 16. Accessibility  | 58. Independence    | 100. Calmness      |
| 17. Involvement    | 59. Awe             |                    |
| 18. Consciousness  | 60. Openness        |                    |
| 19. Collegiality   | 61. Sincerity       |                    |
| 20. Comfort        | 62. Originality     |                    |
| 21. Compassion     | 63. Abundance       |                    |
| 22. Competition    | 64. Development     |                    |
| 23. Concentration  | 65. Pleasure        |                    |
| 24. Continuity     | 66. Performance     |                    |
| 25. Gratitude      | 67. Professionalism |                    |
| 26. Bravery        | 68. Justice         |                    |
| 27. Expertise      | 69. Respect         |                    |
| 28. Servitude      | 70. Result/ outcome |                    |
| 29. Discipline     | 71. Wealth          |                    |
| 30. Clarity        | 72. Fame            |                    |
| 31. Sustainability | 73. Beauty          |                    |
| 32. Honesty        | 74. Solidarity      |                    |
| 33. Efficiency     | 75. Cleverness      |                    |
| 34. Recognition    | 76. Stability       |                    |
| 35. Flexibility    | 77. Success         |                    |
| 36. Patience       | 78. Accessibility   |                    |
| 37. Obedience      | 79. Dedication      |                    |
| 38. Happiness      | 80. Tolerance       |                    |
| 39. Equality       | 81. Challenge       |                    |
| 40. Ease           | 82. Uniformity      |                    |
| 41. Affection      | 83. Resilience      |                    |
| 42. Health         | 84. Responsibility  |                    |

## Appendix 4: Early risk assessment for the research

Risk assessment - completed November 2014, before the start of the research	
Hazard	Control measures
<b>Risk of physical threat or abuse</b>	Very limited risk, but to provide researcher duty of care I will be leaving details of all meeting names, contact details, times and places with my supervisor. In group meetings/interviews/focus groups, I will be accompanied by an observer as part of the research methodology.
<b>Risk of psychological trauma to researcher (as a result of actual or threatened violence or the nature of what is disclosed during the interaction)</b>	Very limited risk, as the substance of the interviews are very unlikely to generate this nature of data. If I am threatened in any way, I will report this both to my supervisor and to the relevant authorities, eg senior management within the organisation I am working with; local police / law enforcement. If I am distressed by material shared – again, exceedingly unlikely, my first port of call will be my supervisor. However, I am confident of my ability to handle challenging situations appropriately because of my experience in holding difficult conversations with people over 20 years as a mediator and facilitator.
<b>Risk of being in a compromising situation (in which there might be accusations of improper behaviour)</b>	Low-medium risk. I am not working with vulnerable adults or children or young people, and think there is very limited risk of this in terms of behaviour in interviews. There is a possibility that participants could feel that information / data has been inappropriately shared with others, especially if the study illuminates or exacerbates tensions within or between collaboration partners, throwing light on issues which have previously been ignored. This will require rigorous attention to issues of confidentiality and anonymising of the data, as well as careful facilitation and sharing of data collected.
<b>Increased exposure to risks of everyday life and social interaction (such as road accidents or serious illness)</b>	Very low risk - the normal, everyday level of risk to me as an individual is in no way altered by this research project.
<b>Risk of causing psychological or physical harm to others</b>	Low-medium risk and needs prior thought and attention before data collection begins. There is a possibility that the study could illuminate or even exacerbate tensions within or between collaboration partners, throwing light on issues which have previously been ignored. This will require rigorous attention to issues of confidentiality and anonymising of the data, as well as careful facilitation and sharing of data collected. It may well be appropriate to highlight this potential issue to individuals as they consent to taking part in the study.

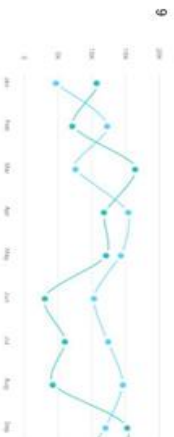
Appendix 5: Examples of visualization design research



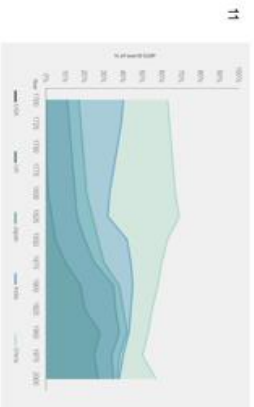


## COMPARING LINE AND FILLS

### Line only



### Line and solid fill



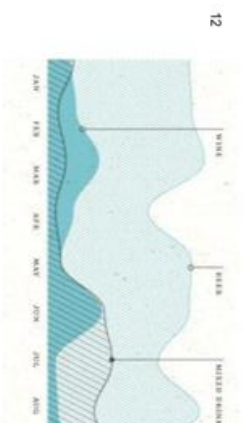
Solid colour fills can add more drama to the general look, however lines can be hidden in areas where they dip below the layer above. To fix this problem we could increase the transparency as per 10 or 12, so we can peer through the layers.

Adding more layers of understanding i.e. laughter and mood to charts with fills, may appear too busy and confusing.

### Line and fill with transparency



### Line and fill with transparency (textured)





Hen Wilkinson

Jul 4, 2018

Resolve

first response. line and fill good for single energy line, as first baseline for laughter points perhaps. would it work for the three rater scores + energy line? not sure... is that where you were thinking of it for?



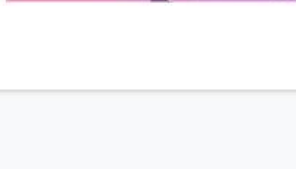
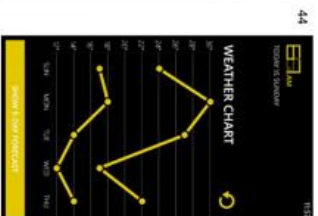
Derek Edwards

Jul 6, 2018

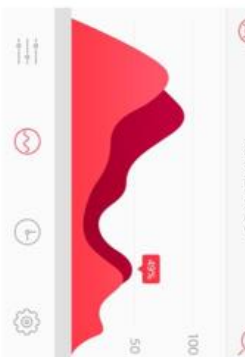
It could begin to get a bit noisy but we could experiment. The colour of the fill could represent laughter or mood. This

[Show more](#)

## COLLECTION OF LINE CHARTS



## My Dashboard



Hen Wilkinson  
Jul 4, 2018

Resolve

this 'funnel' look/idea was where my very earliest thoughts about energy presentation started... not so much about a funnel (as it's not) but about the visual concept, then I wondered if it really works with the type of data we're trying to present - it's that ongoing balance between function and form / form and function...

Show less

Derek Edwards  
Jul 6, 2018

I think the funnel, bottom far left has a spectrum analyser feel to it. A similar idea to the sound wave.

## Appendix 6: Unitized transcripts of groups' fields of tension

### UK Group 1 field of tension

Line	Unit	Time		
1	1	0.00	P2	<i>so it's strong, strong then there's lots of good</i>
2				<i>communication there, lots of strong communication</i>
3			P1	<i>Yes ...</i>
4			P2	<i>and then you brought in</i>
5			P1	<i>let's call it music shall we?</i>
6			P2	<i>music to our ears</i>
7			P1	<i>that's music [singing]</i>
8	2	0.22	P2	<i>yup. that's a good thought. And then you drew in me, P5,</i>
9				<i>P4 and P3 to do the donkey work</i>
8				<i>[ironic snort/ laughter]</i>
10			P1	<i>ooooohhh</i>
11	3	0.40	P1	<i>so em, yea, so that was all... well P3 was already in there,</i>
12				<i>P3 was in the first tranche, cos you, because in fact</i>
13				<i>you were the pin of getting the thing, getting the</i>
14			P3	<i>I was going to say,</i>
15			P1	<i>the first tranche, yeah</i>
16			P3	<i>yes, well you know,</i>
17			P1	<i>you were really the lynchpin of getting the</i>
18			P3	<i>if I had to be completely lacking in modesty</i>
19			P1	<i>yeah</i>
20			P3	<i>I would draw one of these things between my name and</i>
21				<i>these guys</i>
22			P1	<i>yea that's right,</i>
23	4	1.10	P2	<i>you're doing it, you're doing it in another colour</i>
24			P1	<i>cos that was the key thing here wasn't it?</i>
25			P3	<i>to get the accreditation</i>
26			P2	<i>that's good</i>
27	5	1.19	P1	<i>and probably you remember L-, weren't you?</i>
28			P3	<i>I remember L-</i>
29			P1	<i>were you involved in getting that kind of ... with that</i>
30				<i>relationship?</i>
31			P3	<i>yea. L- was my main point of contact</i>
32			P1	<i>it was really here...</i>
33	6	1.35	P2	<i>and who were you connected to, P1?</i>
34			P1	<i>well I mean because we've got different timelines it's a bit</i>
35				<i>weird isn't it... but then so for... so... that moved into</i>
36				<i>mainly R- and N- I'd say for me.</i>
37			P2	<i>Well put connections to them then</i>
38			P1	<i>OK</i>
39	7	1.55	P3	<i>I mean I remember you having quite a strong connection</i>
40				<i>with R-, like, rather, you know, anxious</i>

42			P2	<i>was it good communication ... or? what was that?</i>
43	<b>8</b>	2.07	P1	<i>that was um... that was about ... erm... that was about</i>
44				<i>delivery and money, really.</i>
45			P2	<i>and did the communication flow well, or.. ?</i>
46			P1	<i>yeah, yeah ... no well as good as it could, I suppose [reluctant]</i>
47				<i>what can I say about that?</i>
48			P2	<i>I dont know</i>
49	<b>9</b>	2.24	P1	<i>[Sighing]</i>
50	<b>10</b>	2.28	P3	<i>In my case for example I can remember always being of</i>
51				<i>course difficulties but overall I would say that my</i>
52				<i>communication with say for example the guys at APT, and L-</i>
53				<i>as well who is the only person I was in contact</i>
54				<i>with at L-y, was overall good.</i>
55			P1	<i>good, good</i>
56			P2	<i>Good</i>
57	<b>11</b>	2.45	P1	<i>so we should have these as, we should have good</i>
58				<i>communication, just write</i>
59	<b>12</b>	2.48	P5	<i>are we going to write down somewhere what these are?</i>
60			P3	<i>No</i>
61			P1	<i>it's collapsed now</i>
62			P4	<i>yeah</i>
63	<b>13</b>	2.55	P3	<i>I suppose good-ish</i>
64			P1	<i>yeah, good-ish</i>
65	<b>14</b>	3.03	P2	<i>quick thing about power, I just want to ask you about power</i>
66				<i>there.</i>
67			P1	<i>Yup</i>
68			P2	<i>was that two-way communication? [Pause]</i>
69				<i>or did you have to go to R-, or.. ?</i>
70	<b>15</b>	3.16	P1	<i>I don't know, there were some very weird communications</i>
71				<i>between R- and L-, all very very weird</i>
72			P2	<i>well why don't you use red for weird communication?</i>
73			P1	<i>OK</i>
74	<b>16</b>	3.26	P5	<i>can we write down somewhere what these communications are</i>
75				<i>its... it is saying how were they significant</i>
76			P4	<i>just put weird</i>
77			P2	<i>we're going to write it on it, yeah</i>
78	<b>17</b>	3.36	P3	<i>there was a lot of a power struggle in between the two, in</i>
79				<i>between L- and R-</i>
80			P2	<i>this is money, it's not communication is it...</i>
81			P1	<i>OK</i>
82	<b>18</b>	3.42	P4	<i>at what point then do the hosts come in, this bottom band?</i>
83			P5	<i>right yes, let's go with that</i>
84			P1	<i>the power the power struggle between the community</i>
85				<i>organisers and the local hosts</i>
86			P2	<i>so let's have weird power struggle</i>
87			P1	<i>it can be positive, can be positive support, but it was also</i>
88				<i>power struggles going on</i>

89			P2	Yup
90	19	4.01	P3	<i>I would add a power struggle here between L- and R-</i>
91			P1	<i>yup yup yes you add that, come on let's just get on with it</i>
92				<i>there's definitely a power struggle with Community Organisers</i>
93				<i>and R-</i>
94			P3	<i>Yeah</i>
95	20	4.12		[Silence]
96	21	4.18	P2	<i>I'm going to say that the government holds ALL the power, I don't</i>
97				<i>know if you all agree. I've just put that because in the end they</i>
98				<i>were giving the money,</i>
99			P1	<i>yup yup</i>
100			P5	<i>and also at the beginning they decided where to put</i>
101				<i>the money</i>
102			P2	<i>who, where, how, yeah</i>
103			P3	<i>if you equate power with money, yes I agree</i>
104			P2	<i>so yes, so we could have more conversations about that ...</i>
105	22	4.37	P4	<i>so who was involved with the Community Organisers? obviously</i>
106				<i>CR but also ... well the um, well obviously these guys</i>
107			P2	<i>the COs were totally connected there</i>
108			P4	<i>yesss, so volunteers really, they were only connected to the</i>
109				<i>Community Organisers? as their first point of contact, their only</i>
110				<i>point of contact?</i>
111			P3	<i>as far as my knowledge goes</i>

#### UK Group 2 field of tension

Line	Unit	Time		
1	1	0.00	P8	<i>there's not much of a linear progression to these personal...</i>
2			P6	<i>er no</i>
3			P7	<i>was the programme beginning, did J- come out of that?</i>
4			P10	<i>no, it came out of J-.</i>
5			P8	[Laughing]
6	2	0.15	P6	<i>if anything...</i>
7			P10	<i>J- wrote the bid.</i>
8			P6	<i>J- wrote the bid</i>
9			P7	<i>Oh ok</i>
10			P9	<i>? unclear</i>
11			P8	<i>I'm finding it a bit weird [? Unclear]</i>
12	3	0.23	P6	<i>yes, and it is fair to say there was a huge amount of J-</i>
13				<i>personally, er... and strongly personally, in the bid, rather</i>
14				<i>than a huge amount of L-, in fact. Um.</i>
15				<i>And that reflected on her quite maverick relationship with</i>
16				<i>L-, which was legitimate, you know, legitimised at L-, it was</i>
17				<i>accepted, um, but it was hers, it literally was hers. And, she</i>

18				<i>kind of took N- and I along with her on that.</i>
19	<b>4</b>	1.02	P8	<i>When did the accreditation hub become... ?</i>
20			P6/9	<i>[Unclear comments]</i>
21			P7	<i>I'd finished being a community organiser, it wasn't that long ago was it?</i>
22				
23	<b>5</b>	1.16	P6	<i>But this is a CO Ltd</i>
24			P10	<i>that's the VTP accreditation, isn't it?</i>
25			P6	<i>well yes, but the accreditation hub for the VTP kind of came after the</i>
26				<i>programme had ended, because we, SM- was, I mean I think you were</i>
27				<i>kind of getting involved [to P9] in the same way you were getting</i>
28				<i>involved with training?</i>
29			P9	<i>Yea</i>
30			P6	<i>um, but it was, it didn't burgeon until the end of the programme, really,</i>
31				<i>right at the end</i>
32			P10	<i>last 6 months</i>
33			P6	<i>yeah last 6 months</i>
34	<b>6</b>	1.50	P10	<i>so, the director of training kind of comes here somewhere...</i>
35			P6	<i>the director-of-training is probably with N-</i>
36			P10	<i>Yeah</i>
37			P6	<i>or around there.</i>
38	<b>7</b>	2.01	P6	<i>Do we need anybody else?</i>
39			P10	<i>Do we have to? [chuckle]</i>
40			P6	<i>... from um... I'm just asking the question</i>
41			P10	<i>I suppose we could na-, I suppose the same way we have L-, we could</i>
42				<i>have R-, couldn't we?</i>
43			P9	<i>Do we? Do we? [laughing]. Sorry.</i>
44	<b>8</b>	2.17	P6	<i>[speaking loudly over P8 &amp; P10] It's one of the things obviously about</i>
45				<i>that and our organisations and how we identify with them...</i>
46	<b>9</b>	2.23	P8	<i>[Side conversation to P10] Do you want to put it up here?</i>
47			P10	<i>Don't want to put it up, suppose I could put it down there</i>
48			P8	<i>Down here, next to L-</i>
49	<b>10</b>	2.26	P6	<i>[continuing] ... is that at the end once we get to kind of here'ish, the</i>
50				<i>people that to an outsider they would think 'R-' were no longer with R-</i>
51				<i>[central organisation]</i>
52			All	<i>[non-committal] Hmmmm</i>
53			P6	<i>they were... individuals.</i>
54	<b>11</b>	2.44		<i>Extended silence – several seconds.</i>
55	<b>12</b>	2.48	P8	<i>or right there maybe? [Aside, quiet]</i>
56	<b>13</b>	2.51	P6	<i>could we have a big bomb?</i>
57			P9	<i>[laughs]</i>
58			P8	<i>big bomb?</i>
59			P9	<i>[chuckling]</i>
60			P6	<i>I'm talking not literally</i>
61			P8	<i>oh for goodness sake [frustrated]</i>
62			P10	<i>what, a picture of a bomb?</i>
63			P9	<i>with the psshhh [making sound of a fuse]</i>

64			P6	<i>for action camp number 2</i>
65			Ps8&9	<i>[laughing]</i>
66	14	3.05	P7	<i>[quiet] Can I have a paper?</i>
67	15	3.07	P10	<i>[irritated] ok, so we're not naming names but we probably just</i>
68				<i>should. So – I'm going to just write K- and A- in there... [sound of</i>
69				<i>writing]</i>
70	16	3.16	P7	<i>And it could, we could add Action Camp 2 because that was a</i>
71			P9	<i>turning point</i>
72			P7	<i>yea, and again it was a kind of entity, like...</i>
73	17	3.25		<i>[Silence]</i>
74	18	3.30	P10	<i>[Aside, private joke] I just put myself on top of them</i>
75			P9	<i>[Chuckling]</i>
76	19	3.33	P8	<i>there you go, there's your bomb</i>
77			P6	<i>thank you, I didn't mean that sort of bomb actually, I meant more</i>
78				<i>ripples...</i>
79			P8	<i>well you can do your own thing</i>
80			P9	<i>[laughs] that's the bomb I envisioned, I envisioned that bomb</i>
81	20	3.46	P6	<i>What about</i>
82			P8	<i>you wanted to call your fashion business something violent</i>
83			P6	<i>Fashion and Firebombs,</i>
84			P8	<i>yea, yea</i>
85			P6	<i>and it became Style &amp; Sedition</i>
86			P8	<i>good</i>
87			P6	<i>after Hannah's intervention</i>
88			P8	<i>Quaker feedback</i>
89				<i>General laughter</i>
90	21	3.58	Ps8&6	<i>Eerrrrmmmm</i>
91			P6	<i>I'm not sure it's the right place cos we haven't covered that event,</i>
92				<i>but, it's here...</i>
93	22	4.09	P8	<i>so the few that are kind of along the, I mean so we've got R- here</i>
94				<i>because it's become more H-</i>
95			P10	<i>well, in the same way as there's two H-s because there's the DoT</i>
96				<i>for R-, and then there's H-</i>
97			P8	<i>yea, yea, over there</i>
98			P10	<i>somewhere over here, yeah</i>
99	23	4.27	P7	<i>that's quite interesting cos while I look at this I think I don't</i>
100				<i>recognise any of this, cos like</i>
101			P8	<i>yea</i>
102			P7	<i>and and then it's like H-'s escaped, like...</i>
103			P10	<i>and she did</i>
104			P7	<i>... d'you know what I mean, that's it. And then, I like that. There's</i>
105				<i>this this bomb's happened and then [Lots of laughter] Then</i>
106				<i>there's people, you know – organisation, and then people</i>
107			P9	<i>[laughing]</i>
108	24	4.50	P8	<i>... is over here</i>
109			P6	<i>it's R- ... herself... but uh [sighing]</i>

## NL Group 1 field of tension

1	1	0.00	P13	<i>... to participate?</i>
2			P11	<i>These people [taps on the drawing]</i>
3			P14	<i>hm mmm</i>
4	2	0.04	P11	<i>Really? And now there are several – that is also important - These people</i>
5				<i>who take part in the residents' committee and who have</i>
6				<i>been trained. The people who always had the biggest problem with</i>
7				<i>E-, conflicts which were mediated thanks to our intervention.</i>
8				<i>Several of these people have participated [taps drawing] and that</i>
9				<i>went very well. They are now ambassadors for the training.</i>
10	3	0.33	P12	<i>M- brought a whopper of a conflict to our attention.</i>
11			P11	<i>Yes and that conflict was a result of a big conflict there [pointing at</i>
12				<i>map]. So really we should make more conflicts!</i>
13			P12	<i>No it starts with conflict, those are the energetic people, those who face</i>
14				<i>up to conflict.</i>
15	4	0.53	P11	<i>The neighbourhood inhabitants, they are the key factor. I am absolutely</i>
16				<i>convinced of this. AND people like O-. And also E-.</i>
17				<i>If we hadn't had these people, we would be long gone by now.</i>
		1.10		Late participant calls to say he has arrived. Recording of session paused. 6 minutes later...
18	5	1.20	P13	<i>Hey, good that you are here!</i>
19			P14	<i>Hi, M- [introducing self]</i>
20			P16	<i>R-, nice to meet you. [introducing self]</i>
21	6	1.37	R	<i>Have a chair</i>
22			P15	<i>Sorry for being late</i>
23			P13	<i>But now you're here!</i>
24	7	1.48	P12	<i>We just finished an exercise which I will explain in English</i>
25			R	<i>Is English OK?</i>
26			P15	<i>No problem!</i>
27	8	1.56	P12	<i>[In English] So we will explain in English what we have done. OK, the</i>
28				<i>exercise was to draw all the organisations in Almere, one</i>
29				<i>of our new projects who are Involved in the Inkr8 process. Shall I go</i>
30				<i>on? [To researcher]</i>
31			R	<i>Please</i>
32			P12	<i>There's one woningcorporatie,</i>
33	9	2.22	P13	<i>[In Dutch] I suggest we do it in Dutch</i>
34			P14	<i>Housing corporation</i>
35	10	2.25	P12	<i>[in English] housing cooperation [moves into Dutch] and they introduced</i>
36				<i>us. They work together with another housing</i>
37				<i>cooperation and with the municipality. The three of them gave us a</i>
38				<i>follow up assignment to get people in Almere Haven involved.</i>
39				<i>The inhabitants and other organisations, such as residents'</i>



40 committees, a 'white' club, the neighbourhood worker  
 from  
 41 Amsterdam. S- and J- who had trained people there. A  
 couple of  
 42 important people are H- and his family. They got lots of  
 friends and  
 43 family involved, about 50 altogether. And there are new  
 key people  
 44 in another neighborhood in Almere, who we also see as  
 45 leaders. There is De S-, a youth and welfare organisation. In  
 general there is  
 46 a lot of interest from these three organisations and  
 participation  
 47 as well, mostly from the municipality. But the welfare  
 organisations  
 48 say they are interested but they don't participate.  
 49 We had lots of contact with the mosque, but in the end  
 50 they don't participate. We have met with a lot of people in  
 schools,  
 51 who also say they are interested but have no time to invest  
 52 in training. We have given presentations to young people  
 who now  
 53 want to participate in the third phase of this project.  
 54 11 4.27 P11 Neighbourhood inhabitants are the real key factor. They  
 are – and  
 55 that is good, we have been working on this there for two  
 years, and  
 56 now there is a new group of inhabitants who are  
 enthusiastic and  
 57 want to participate. They want to do the 'train the trainer'  
 58 programme. And this is typical for what happens. We  
 59 recently composed a letter for B- to send to these people,  
 telling them that  
 60 the decision to let us train them has not yet been taken!

## NL Group 2 field of tension

Line	Unit	Time		
1	1	0.00	P21	<i>beautiful [laughing; sounds of drawing on map]</i>
2	2	0.06	P18	<i>And what about you, R- ?</i>
3			P19	<i>It is a bit difficult for me. What have I done as school?</i>
4				<i>My colleagues and other personnel who live in the</i>
5				<i>neighbourhood and have taken part in the</i>
6				<i>training programme. I have a supporting role for the</i>
7				<i>neighbourhood committee.</i>
8				<i>People from that committee have also</i>
9				<i>become more active. Yes, I support the</i>
10				<i>initiatives and I listen to</i>
11				<i>what people say.</i>
12	3	1.06	P21	<i>Where should we place the school? Do you think the</i>
13				<i>school is really part of the neighbourhood? In terms of</i>
14			P19	<i>its social function, the school is in the neighbourhood.</i>
15			P21	<i>So maybe we put another circle here with your name?</i>
16			P18	<i>I think that you're more in the neighbourhood than B-,</i>
17				<i>E- or myself.</i>
18			P20	<i>You connect with a large part of the people living</i>
19				<i>there.</i>
20	4	1.37	P21	<i>[unclear]</i>
21			P19	<i>Yes, but not all...</i>
22			P21	<i>In what way?</i>
23			P19	<i>Some neighbourhood inhabitants don't have children</i>
24				<i>at our school. They are just inhabitants in the</i>
25				<i>neighbourhood. But they have done the training and</i>
26				<i>are affected by the spreading of ideas and networks.</i>
27				<i>The anything to do with it, in the way that you do. But</i>
28				<i>school board doesn't have anything to do with it, in</i>
29				<i>the way that you do. But teachers and parents in that</i>
30				<i>sense the school does. As an organisation we have</i>
31	5	2.33	P21	<i>contacts and discussions...</i>
32			P17	<i>Did you know P17?</i>
33			P19	<i>From the Centre, yes</i>
34			P17	<i>Yes, yes, no, no</i>
35			P19	<i>Your face is known to me</i>
36			P17	<i>Hmm? [as if not understanding P17's accent]</i>
37				<i>Your face is known to me [laughing to cover</i>
38			P19	<i>embarrassment, P18 joins in] yes</i>
39			P21	<i>Yes but that could also be from a party... no</i>
40			P18	<i>You do know her?</i>
41	6	3.00	P21	<i>Yes</i>
				<i>Shall I draw a link?</i>

42			P18	<i>Yes, do.</i>
43			P21	<i>And the link between us?</i>
44			P18	<i>But we don't know each other via Inkr8 but rather</i>
45				<i>through the Regional Office.</i>
45	7	3.18		[Unclear discussion about drawing and arrows]
46	8	4.20	P21	<i>Are there other partners we need to include?</i>
47			P20	<i>Yes R - we also have had contact with them</i>
48			P21	<i>Other important parties, for example the police?</i>
49			P19	<i>De S-?</i>
50			P18	<i>Yes, there's also contact with De S-.</i>
51			P21	<i>Is De S- inside the neighbourhood or outside?</i>
52	9	4.49	P18 /19	<i>Outside it</i>
53			P18	<i>They also work with the K-</i>
54			P19	<i>And they also have a representative in...</i>
55			P21	<i>And what is the name..?</i>

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